



# Catalyzing CHANGE

Profiles of Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators  
from Greene, Tompkins, and Erie Counties, New York

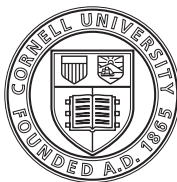
Edited by Scott J. Peters, Daniel J. O'Connell,  
Theodore R. Alter, and Allison L. H. Jack



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Cornell University

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For additional copies of this book, email [sp236@cornell.edu](mailto:sp236@cornell.edu) or call 607-255-9713. This book is also available for free download as a pdf document at [http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/COLL\\_Educators.htm](http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/COLL_Educators.htm).

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# acknowledgments

CATALYZING CHANGE is a collection of eight practitioner profiles of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators from Greene, Tompkins, and Erie counties in upstate New York. It is the second volume in an on-going series that is designed to provoke and inform critical reflection about the nature and meaning of Extension work, not only in New York State but also throughout the national Cooperative Extension System.<sup>1</sup> Given the unusual nature of this book, three different kinds of acknowledgments are in order.

First, we want to acknowledge and thank all those who helped to make this book possible. Most important among them are Andy Turner, Rick Burstell, Bob Beyfuss, Marilyn Wyman, Ken Schlather, Monika Roth, Nancy Potter, and Sally Cunningham. We thank these educators for sharing their stories and experiences. We also want to formally express our deepest admiration and respect for their remarkable professional integrity, their steadfast dedication to the pursuit of public purposes, and their infectious and inspiring sense of hope and possibility. For their skillful interviewing, transcribing and editing, we thank Jean Griffiths, Larry Van De Valk, David Kay, Kim Niewolny, Jeremy Sporrang, and Margo Hittleman. Kim Niewolny and Margo Hittleman deserve special thanks for their contributions to the larger, on-going research project from which the profiles in this book are drawn. For their critical comments on early drafts of his introductory essay, Scott would like to thank Neil Schwartzbach, Mike Duttweiler, Ken Schlather, Andy Turner, Nancy Potter, Monika Roth, and Ted Alter. We give our thanks and deep gratitude to Helene Dillard for providing financial, intellectual, and moral support and encouragement for this project. We also wish to recognize and thank her for her deep commitment to Extension's public mission, and for her leadership as Director of the CCE system. Glenn Applebee, Lorraine Cleveland, Dan Harris, Paul Bonaparte-Krough, and Sheila Sager all made contributions

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<sup>1</sup> The first volume, a collection of ten profiles of educators from CCE-New York City entitled "We Grow People," is available for download as a pdf document at [http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/COLL\\_Educators.htm](http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/COLL_Educators.htm).

# acknowledgments

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for which we are grateful. We thank Mo Viele for her patience and her superb work in designing this book. As always, Scott wishes to thank John Forester for serving as an invaluable teacher, mentor, and friend.

Second, we want to acknowledge both the limits and potential value of practitioner profiles as a source of learning and insight about Extension education.<sup>2</sup> In essence, practitioner profiles are oral histories that are edited from the transcripts of recorded interviews. They provide brief first person accounts of practitioners' life stories, views, judgments, work, and experiences. These accounts are inherently partial and subjective. They do not and cannot reveal the full scope of a practitioner's work, nor do they reveal the objective "truth" about what a practitioner has "actually" done or experienced. Further, they do not and cannot authoritatively document the outcomes or results of a practitioner's work. Despite these limits, profiles offer considerable value as windows onto practice and experience. What we see through these windows can be quite suggestive, instructive, and provocative. Profiles can surprise, puzzle, inspire, disappoint, and/or trouble us. They can challenge (or confirm) our presumptions and theories about a given field of practice: not only its nature, but also its larger social, cultural, economic, historical, and political meaning and significance. Additionally, the process of constructing profiles can be valuable as a means of stimulating and encouraging practitioners' critical self-reflection.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that the profiles that are included in this book do not represent the full range and diversity of Extension work in Greene, Tompkins, and Erie counties. Particularly missing are educators who work in nutrition, and in youth development through the 4-H program. It is our hope and intention to include such educators in future volumes in this series.

Scott Peters, Dan O'Connell, Ted Alter, and Allison Jack  
*August, 2006*

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the development, use, limits, and potential value of practitioner profiles, go to: <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/>.

# preface

Cornell Cooperative Extension in New York State is the oldest and most comprehensive outreach arm of Cornell University. The historical and philosophical basis for the educational work of extension is deeply rooted in the rationale of the founders of Cornell University and the land-grant university system of the United States.

This book offers a snapshot of one of the basic philosophical tenets of the people who are doing extension work in today's world. While remaining integrally linked to the academy, the *work* is being done in local communities—the front lines of society.

Societal issues and problems are often sharply contrasted and old methods of education clash with new. Vibrant dynamic systems like Cornell Cooperative Extension continuously change to address new ways of conducting educational work. However, some core operating principles remain and this book illustrates one of these: people helping people where they are. Amid dramatic changes in technology, economic transformations and global shifts in educational methodologies, the individual perspectives such as those outlined in this book bring us back to a basic need of humanity: the human touch factor. The perspectives related here are reflective of the fundamental challenges faced by educators and the successes of person-to-person education they have experienced.

This book is an excellent read for persons working in any aspect of education or community enhancement. It provides tremendous insight into the passion behind the work and the immeasurable value of human interaction.

Helene R. Dillard, Ph.D.

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*Associate Dean, Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Human Ecology*

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*Executive Associate Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension*

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*introduction*



# It's Not Just Providing Information

## Perspectives on the Purposes and Significance of Extension Work

By **Scott Peters**

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) is a community education system with an annual budget of more than \$125 million, two-thirds of which comes from county, state, and federal government appropriations. It employs over 500 extension educators in 57 county-based associations, plus New York City. These educators work with hundreds of Cornell University faculty and staff and thousands of community members to pursue CCE's official mission: to enable "people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and knowledge to work."<sup>1</sup>

Over the past five years, more than fifty CCE educators were invited to tell stories about their lives and work in individual interviews, most of which were conducted by Cornell graduate students. Recorded, transcribed, and edited into "profiles," these stories provide considerable insight into educators' views about their work and experiences. *We Grow People*, a collection of ten profiles of educators from New York City, was published in 2003. *Catalyzing Change* is a new collection of eight profiles of educators from Greene, Tompkins, and Erie counties in upstate New York.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statistics and quote from CCE's web site, <http://www.cce.cornell.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> For details about how the profiles in this book were developed, go to <http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/>. Both *Catalyzing Change* and *We Grow People* are available to download as PDF documents at [http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/Courses/practicestories/COLL\\_Educators.htm](http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/Courses/practicestories/COLL_Educators.htm).

# introduction

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In this brief introductory essay, I look to the profiles in this new collection for insights into Extension's purposes and significance, both as a particular form of community education, and as an organization. Specifically, I raise and answer two closely related questions:

- How do the Extension educators in this collection understand and articulate the purposes of their work?
- In light of these purposes, how should we understand the significance of Extension educators' work in contemporary society?

## Background

CCE is part of the national Cooperative Extension System that was established in 1914 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act into law. This system involves a partnership between a federal agency (the United States Department of Agriculture), land-grant universities, state and local governments, and the general citizenry. In the language of the Smith-Lever Act, Extension's original work was to "aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics, and to encourage the application of the same."<sup>3</sup>

Today, Extension work is often described in organizational rhetoric as the dissemination, interpretation, and/or application of university research and expertise to address individual, family, business, and community needs and problems. While agriculture remains a key focus, Extension also works in urban, suburban, and rural areas on issues related to nutrition and health, family and consumer science, the environment, horticulture, natural resource and wildlife management, youth development, leadership development, and community and economic development.

As we approach the national Extension system's centennial, neither its continuing relevance nor its survival can be taken for granted. Survival hinges on public funding, and public funding hinges on perceptions of public relevance: that is, on the degree to which Extension is perceived to be of value in pursuing public interests and ends. With respect to this matter, the Extension system has a problem:

**As we approach the national Extension system's centennial, neither its continuing relevance nor its survival can be taken for granted.**

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<sup>3</sup> Smith-Lever Act quoted from Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989), p. 254.

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it suffers from a narrow and relatively uninteresting image. Despite its broad reach and work, Extension is often portrayed and perceived as nothing more than a neutral, one-way mechanism or conduit for diffusing research-based information in response to people's questions about farming, gardening, and nutrition. If it were really true that this is all Extension is about, it would be hard to imagine—in the age of the internet and tight public budgets—how its relevance and its continued

**Extension is often portrayed and perceived as nothing more than a neutral, one-way mechanism or conduit for diffusing research-based information ...**

existence at taxpayers' expense could be justified. But this is not all Extension is about.

CCE's official mission of enabling "people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and knowledge to work" suggests that there is something far broader, more interesting, and more publicly relevant about Extension's mission and work than answering

people's questions from a stance of neutrality. It suggests that Extension is about human and community development. In other words, it suggests that Extension is about *change*, and it positions CCE and its educators and collaborators as *agents or catalysts of change*. In doing so, it raises difficult questions of purpose and significance.

For what purposes and in what ways do CCE educators seek to enable people to improve (i.e., change) their lives and communities? What constitutes improvement? Who decides that improvements ought to be made in individuals and communities, what these improvements should be, and how they should be made? What values and ideals ground and guide extension educators' roles and work as agents of change? How are we to understand the public relevance, meaning, and significance of extension educators' change-agent work, particularly in relation to the question of whether or not Extension should be supported by public tax dollars?

The profiles in this book provide us with tentative answers to these (and many other) questions. However, it is important to emphasize that they do not provide us with answers that can be generalized across or beyond the CCE system. These profiles do not constitute a random, representative sample. Rather, they constitute a purposeful sample that was deliberately selected to illuminate provocative rather than representative views and work. The profiles in this book are provocative because they challenge prevailing views and presumptions about what Extension is and how and why it matters. They help us to see and understand Extension as a

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*non-neutral force for change*, where Extension education is not only or mainly about providing information and answering questions, but *catalyzing change*.

There is nothing new or unique about viewing Extension as a catalyst or agent of change. As I have learned from veteran educators, CCE has used a change agent language to describe Extension's mission and work for at least three decades. Such a language has also been used in many papers published in the *Journal of Extension*, the peer-reviewed journal for the Extension profession.<sup>4</sup> But the important issue is not whether or for how long Extension educators have viewed themselves and their organization as catalysts or agents of change. Rather, it is what such a view *means*, and what its implications are with respect to how we might answer difficult questions of purpose and significance.

## Purposes

Monika Roth, the Agriculture and Environment Program Leader for CCE-Tompkins County, tells us in her profile that "Extension is a grassroots effort."

It's more than just that process of, "I have the information you need. I am the teacher and you are the student." It's much more engaged. It is an engaged process. We involve people to make change.

Monika's view that Extension is more than a one-way process of providing information, that it is an "engaged process" that involves people in making change, can be found in every profile in this book. While this view is intriguing, it doesn't reveal anything about the *kinds* of change Extension involves people to make. In other words, it doesn't reveal what Extension's *purposes* are. Surely Extension's purpose isn't making change for change's sake. It must be about making change in order to pursue particular values, ideals, interests, and ends. But which ones?

**The profiles in this book are provocative because they challenge prevailing views and presumptions about what Extension is and how and why it matters.**

During a collective reflection session I helped to facilitate with the four educators from CCE-Greene County whose profiles are included in this book, I raised

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, R.S. Morse, P.W. Brown, and J.E. Warning. (2006). "Catalytic Leadership: Reconsidering the Nature of Extension's Leadership Role." *Journal of Extension*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (April, 2006). Published on-line at <http://www.joe.org/joe/2006april/a9.shtml>.

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the question of what Extension's purpose is. In response, Andy Turner, Executive Director of CCE-Greene County, said the following:

We really need to take a look at what we say Extension's actual purpose is, because to me, it's very bland now. All it talks about is the process of, "We take research and we get it out to communities, and we value what communities say." It doesn't speak to what the outcomes are supposed to be. That doesn't work for me personally at all.

Actually, CCE's official mission statement *does* speak to what the outcomes are supposed to be: namely, enabling people to "improve their lives and communi-

**Surely Extension's purpose isn't making change for change's sake. It must be about making change in order to pursue particular values, ideals, interests, and ends. But which ones?**

ties." But like a language of change, a language of improvement is vague. As Andy correctly notes, it doesn't commit Extension to any *specific* outcomes. This is apparently a problem for him. Why?

As we learn from reading his profile, Andy is deeply critical of contemporary society. "I think that we need to fundamentally change the way our society works, and how we interact with the natural world around us," he tells us.

I think that the model that we currently function under has become so focused on economic development, over and above everything else, that it doesn't include any accounting for impacts on water and air and health and communities. It is not sustainable. It is not an accurate depiction of the health of communities, landscapes, or human beings.

Andy's critique of contemporary society isn't just his personal opinion as a citizen. It's his public judgment as an Extension professional. It directly informs and shapes the public work he pursues as Executive Director of CCE-Greene County. In his words:

My passion right now is to apply through our Extension mission a way to change how we live, to look at our economic system in a different way, to bring in values that we don't seem to account for, such as the health of the landscape, the quality of life in communities, the level of participation in community events and the health of our democracy. That is what I am really into. Extension allows you to pursue that.

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By saying that “Extension allows you to pursue that,” Andy underplays his role as an organizational leader and change agent. The story we read in his profile is not about how he was simply allowed to pursue a social change agenda through CCE-Greene County’s mission. Rather, it’s about how he has worked hard to change the organization’s mission and culture so that he and others could pursue a social change agenda.

When he began his work as Executive Director in 1998, Andy found that CCE-Greene County had lost its vision. “There was not a big picture,” he recalls. “It was just a collection of people who do programs. Nobody really knew what it all added up to.” The problem, he feels, had to do with how the organization had come to view its mission:

Somehow the mission had become certain programs over the years. I felt like it was restricting what we did. It was self-replicating and wasn’t going to take us where I wanted us to go. Instead, the mission should be the changes in the community that we are about, bringing together the right kind of mix of information and people to create better communities. That is the mission. The programs are the mechanism; they are not the mission. I came in with that theory. One of the reasons that I took the position was so I could act on it.

Here’s how Andy describes CCE-Greene County’s current mission in his profile:

Our mission is a community development mission, and we bring to that something different than any other organization in Greene County. The Extension model is to create educational programs that address community needs. It mixes local concerns and local values with the values and expertise that come through the land-grant college. I see it as an equal kind of mixing. As a result, you have a more balanced program that has an opportunity to lead to real impacts and changes in the community. For me, the ultimate goal is that our programs should, at some level, be directed at changes in the community. Over time, we should see how a community, not just individuals, is actually different as a result of Extension programs. *It’s not just providing information.*

As Andy sees it, Extension’s mission isn’t its programs. It’s not just about changing individuals, and it’s not just about providing information. It’s about changing communities. It’s about “bringing together the right kind of mix of information and people to create better communities.” But it’s not just a mix of information and people; it’s a mix that includes *values* as well. Without the crucial ingredient of values, a mission aimed at changing communities by making them “better” is liter-

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ally meaningless. To know what “better” means, we need to know what the specific changes are that Extension educators aim to involve people to make. And we need to know what the specific values are that ground and guide the work educators do to pursue these changes.

If we go back to his strong critique of contemporary society, we see that Andy believes that “we need to fundamentally change the way our society works, and how we interact with the natural world around us.” Grounded in this conviction,

**When we read the profiles in this book, we find Andy and the other educators speaking of more than Extension’s programs, activities, and services.**

for him Extension’s mission is to “change how we live, to look at our economic system in a different way, to bring in values that we don’t seem to account for, such as the health of the landscape, the quality of life in communities, the level of participation in community events and the health of our democracy.” Unlike CCE’s vague official mission of enabling people to

“improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and knowledge to work,” this view of Extension’s mission *does* speak to what the outcomes—and therefore, the purposes—are supposed to be.

When we read the profiles in this book, we find Andy and the other educators speaking of more than Extension’s programs, activities, and services, such as 4-H, Master Gardeners, nutrition and parenting classes, and the facilitation of community visioning processes. We find them speaking of more than answering questions and providing information, expertise, and technical assistance to meet people’s needs and help them solve problems and make informed decisions. We also—and more importantly—find them speaking of their purposes and work as change agents. Specifically, we find them speaking of how and why they seek to *facilitate sustainable development, increase people’s respect and reverence for life, and build local democracy.*

### **Facilitating Sustainable Development**

Rick Burstell grew up on Long Island and worked for many years as a diesel mechanic before taking an Extension educator job with CCE-Greene County. In his profile, Rick describes Greene County, which is in the Catskill Mountains/Hudson Valley region of upstate New York, as a “beautiful place” with a “terrible economy.” Observing that the county is in the midst of a transition, he worries about where things are headed. “Real estate has gone crazy,” he says. “There has been a rise in

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building development. Wal-Mart wants to move in, and Home Depot is moving in. All of this will have, in my view, a negative effect on the community.” So what does he think should be done?

If we develop our area to build the economy, let's make sure that we maintain the integrity of the environment at the same time, so that it doesn't become like where I came from, where it is so polluted. Out on Long Island, there are a lot of educational programs about pesticide uses. They polluted everything down there. There are a million and a half people who live on the eastern tip of Long Island who have been throwing things in their yard and their cess-pools for the last seventy-five years. Then they wonder why all the ground water is polluted. In Greene County, it is a critical time now for people to understand that the things we do in the next couple of years will have a major impact on this place. If we are going to maintain it as one of the special places, we are going to have to take some steps to do that.

This is not the voice of a neutral question answerer. It's the voice of a change agent. Rick consciously pursues his change-agent work as an Extension educator—work that includes answering people's questions about gardening and developing educational programs for youth—in ways that are designed to inspire people to take steps in their lives and communities that will contribute to the public work of facilitating sustainable development. That is one of his central purposes. It is also one of Andy's central purposes. In his profile, Andy speaks of how he and others have been positioning CCE-Greene County to not only contribute to, but also influence the nature and direction of economic development in Greene County. “The things we have been working on lately are focused on economic development,” he tells us.

But we are also trying to be upfront and say, “Look, you need to consider the resources and the landscape. These are all parts of economic development. It's not just creating jobs.” We are not trying to say that we are just an economic development organization. We want to show our piece of this in relation to what the economic development office is doing and what the planning office is doing. We are trying to say, “The landscape and protecting agriculture and how that connects to the tax base and how that leads to tourism dollars are also important.” We are trying to show how, if you have eighty-five percent forested land, you could teach landowners ways to grow ginseng or mushrooms or log it in a way that is sustainable and that doesn't impact on health or water quality. There is nobody else doing that kind of thing in our local community.

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Given that Greene County is eighty-five percent forested land, one of the most important things CCE-Greene County has done in recent years to facilitate sustainable development is to establish the Agroforestry Resource Center (ARC). ARC's goal is "to promote sustainable practices that will provide economic benefits to landowners and communities while preserving forested areas so they continue to provide ecological, economic and public health benefits to the surrounding human population."<sup>5</sup> In his profile, Bob Beyfuss, Agriculture and Natural Resources Issue Leader for CCE-Greene County, tells us the story of how ARC was envisioned and organized. Marilyn Wyman, an Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator with

**While the work of facilitating sustainable development ... is partly a matter of providing and/or developing research-based information, it is also a matter of bringing ecological principles and values into the mix.**

CCE-Greene County, played a key role in the story. In her profile, she tells us: "You have to be able to bring ecological principles to people's everyday work, their businesses, how they live their lives, and how they make the choices that they make." This is the work of facilitating sustainable development. Note that Marilyn is speaking of bringing *principles*, not information, to people's everyday work and lives. While the work of facilitat-

ing sustainable development through ARC and other initiatives and programs is partly a matter of providing and/or developing research-based information, it is also a matter of bringing ecological principles and values into the mix to influence and guide people's views and behaviors.

In the other profiles in this collection, educators from Tompkins and Erie Counties speak of facilitating sustainable development in similar ways. Ken Schlather, Executive Director of CCE-Tompkins County, which is in the Finger Lakes region of central New York, tells us about Extension's role in organizing an energy efficiency initiative. Monika Roth discusses her work of organizing the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty (FLCB) and other projects that are designed to facilitate sustainable development. Nancy Potter, Assistant Director and Issue Leader for Family and Community Well-Being for CCE-Tompkins County, tells us of her work organizing community visioning projects that are meant to influence the nature and direction of development in small towns in sustainable ways. And Sally Cunningham, former Community Horticulture Leader for CCE-Erie County, which

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<sup>5</sup> Quote from the ARC web site: <http://arc.cce.cornell.edu/>

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is in the part of Western New York that includes the economically depressed city of Buffalo, tells us about how gardening can be a vehicle for facilitating sustainable development.

## **Increasing Respect and Reverence for Life**

The purpose of facilitating sustainable development links up with a second purpose we find educators speaking of in their profiles, especially Rick and Sally. This is the moral purpose of *increasing people's respect and reverence for life*.

In his profile, Rick uses the term “life-affirming” several times. “I am trying to make Extension a life-affirming place,” he says.

I'm also trying to get everybody on somewhat the same page about the things we need to do. I personally think we need to evolve if we are going to survive as a species. I just want to bring awareness to as many people as I can. I want people to think about the little things that they do and how that affects the whole world.

We learn about one of the ways Rick has pursued this goal when he tells us the story of a specific Extension project he helped to organize and conduct. In his words, the project

was focused on teaching fourth graders at the local elementary school some relevant information about their environment. I was going in one day a week for about eleven or twelve weeks. I taught them about how plants grow and how important it is for them to respect their environment. We talked about plants and about their relationship to the sun and the earth. We talked about the trees and the forests. We talked about things that they would do in their yard. We would talk about how they would actually have an effect down the road somewhere.

All this talk wasn't just “teaching information,” and it wasn't just teaching ecological principles. It was also teaching moral principles. But it wasn't abstract moralizing. Much of New York City's watershed is in Greene County. Therefore, things people “do in their yard” matter to millions of people. Rick recalls that the “main gist” of the message in his project

was that young people will become the people who will live here in the future. They should have some consciousness of what they do in their yard will end up in the watershed. It does not really matter where you live. You are always in somebody's watershed somewhere no matter what you do. You may think that it's not that relevant to go out and do this or do that in your yard but ultimately

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it does end up as everybody's problem. So if you are conscientious of how you do things at home, you will have a positive effect on the world at large. The main point we tried to tell them was that there were a lot of things that they could do to make sure that they would keep their place safe, clean and pure. We taught them that in order for them to grow their own vegetables and flowers, they didn't have to go out and poison everything all the time. There was a better way to do it.

The moral principles he and his colleagues were teaching youth in this project included respect for life:

We tried to explain different things about their relationship to the forest and how, basically, those critters out there in the forest have been there for a long time, and they had to be respectful of them. We told them that it was not just all put there for their disposal. It wasn't just their playground. We explained that this is their home, and you have to have respect.

Like Rick, Sally Cunningham speaks in her profile of weaving the teaching of the moral principle of respect for life into her teaching of ecological information and principles. But in speaking of her Extension work, which focuses on gardening and community horticulture, she also speaks about her commitment to teach *reverence* for life:

Teaching about beneficial insects in the home garden is my best talk. It's not just that I want to teach people to be kind and not kill insects because of the inherent importance of the insects. That's true, yes. But I think we can get people to have a little reverence and wonder at all the things these insects are doing and how many of them are out there cooperating in what you want to achieve.

Behind Sally's commitment to "teaching people a respect for life and a reverence for the awe of nature and its systems," as she puts it, is a commitment to teaching "the idea that we aren't all in charge here."

We're not all controlling everything. You don't have to go out and buy a product to kill a bug just because you saw it. Rather, the more you understand about how it all works, the less you need to do that controlling thing. I really do think our society needs more people to think like that instead of those who see an ant in the house and go infect everybody by spraying two cans of Raid™. I definitely think people need help because they've lost touch with what our grandparents knew about nature. They knew that there are natural

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systems going on around us, and it's not the end of the world if a spider got in the living room.

In teaching about natural systems, Sally is not just showing people ecological connections, but societal connections as well. "In my educational approach," she says,

I like watching my students catch on to natural systems and how they work. They begin to understand that you can never do just one thing, like kill a bug, because this thing has to do with the next prey it was eating. In the same sense, whether it is our societal systems or in nature's systems, your impact on a child or your impact on a butterfly all has to do with a larger connection. In showing people the connections you are doing a lot of the real education.

Sally's use of the phrase "real education" is important. Several times in her profile, she speaks of "real" teaching, "real" learning, and "real" education. In doing so, she is making the point that education should be about more than providing and consuming information. It should be about the teaching and pursuit of larger purposes, values, and interests.

Sally has a flair for the dramatic, and she utilizes it as a tool for pursuing her larger moral purpose of increasing people's respect and reverence for life. "I do a sort of dramatic thing in one of my talks," she tells us,

where I'll be speaking about "What's the big deal about these insects" and then I'll suddenly slam a book on the floor and screech "YEEEE, I killed it!" Then I'll say, "Now what's wrong with that? Isn't there something wrong if we can just kill something we haven't named? We don't know what it's doing. We don't know what it had to do with us at all. Do we want a lot of kids growing up who can do that? You know, what else do they kill? What other larger creature is the next target? Is it your little kid on the playground they push aside?" I think this is really, truly important. At the simple kindness of humanity level, it's about being a respectful living being.

Here, Sally is giving voice to one of her deepest convictions: that the "gardening medium is a great way to teach people other values and skills." In other words, gardening is not just about gardening; it's about something larger. Like Rick, Sally sees gardening as a means of pursuing a moral purpose that gives her work as an Extension educator meaning. Also like Rick, she has a sense of urgency about this purpose that comes from her view of where things are headed:

We're going to get more crowded around here, and we better be able to ask,

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“Gee, what kind of person is that? What is he doing?” Not judging, saying, “I gotta shoot him.” It’s really a scary world we’re entering, and I believe that respect for diversity is directly linked to how you feel about some creature you never met before. You decide it’s “creepy crawly” just because it’s unfamiliar. It really starts there.

### **Building Local Democracy**

In his profile, Ken Schlather tells us what he was looking for as he searched for a job in the Finger Lakes region of New York State after spending many years abroad working for international rural development agencies. “I wanted to work in economic development,” he recalls, “and I wanted to work with an organization that really focused on strengthening individuals and communities, because I was interested in building democracy at a local level.” Here, Ken is helping us to see how to name the third purpose we find the educators in this book speaking of in their profiles: *building local democracy*. Ken ended up accepting the job of Executive Director of CCE-Tompkins County in

large measure because he saw Extension as an organization that is committed to this purpose.

Ken tells us that he left his international development work with the conviction that successful rural development projects are based on the principles of “local control, local people setting their own priorities, local people designing the solutions or the responses to the issues that they have identified, local people putting their own resources on the table, and then drawing

on the knowledge from universities or from people who aren’t necessarily part of that particular community.” According to him, these principles “are in the design of the Cooperative Extension System.” We see this in action in the story he tells us in his profile about Extension’s role in planning and organizing an energy efficiency initiative. The initiative was developed by a coalition of groups as a response to an emergency caused by the anticipated effects of increased energy costs on low and moderate-income consumers.

“We looked at this situation,” Ken recalls, “and thought if we could put infor-

**Extension helps to build democracy at a local level. Here, the meaning of “democracy” is not voting or partisan politics. Rather, it is democracy as a way of life, as an on-going practice in everyday places that engages people in ... public work.**


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mation about low-cost, energy efficiency programs out in the newspapers and bulletins all over the place, a lot of people would make use of it. Those who did would benefit greatly.” But as we are learning from the educators in this book, Extension work is not just providing information. “If all we did was put information out,” Ken says, “we would have missed an opportunity for strengthening networks, and we would have blown an opportunity for laying the groundwork for a large scale, post-emergency energy efficiency program. We figured, though, that we could design something to allow for interaction between people.” Through their interactions while working together on the energy emergency, Ken explains, people “could begin to develop and strengthen their own networks in their communities and their own leadership skills. Then we could work with them in other ways in the future.”

While Ken’s story illustrates Extension’s work of providing trustworthy information to help people make informed decisions, it also illustrates what he refers to as the “other thing about Extension.” In his words, the “other thing” is the “idea of helping bring organizations or people together by facilitating processes. We help pull the resources together that exist locally to get something done.” Ken believes that by bringing people and organizations together in ways that follow principles of local control, priority setting, design and ownership, Extension helps to build democracy at a local level. Here, the meaning of “democracy” is not voting or partisan politics. Rather, it is democracy as a way of life, as an on-going practice in everyday places that engages people in what Harry Boyte refers to as public work: “sustained effort by a mix of people who solve public problems or create goods, material or cultural, of general benefit.”<sup>6</sup>

Andy Turner sees the purpose of building democracy at the local level through engaging people in public work as a crucial element of Extension’s relevance in contemporary society. In his profile, he notes that people are starting to ask the question of why the public should support Extension. “We should have an answer ready,” he says.



**The democratic process that is part of the philosophy that ... Extension is “extending” is not just a way to make decisions; it is a way for Extension to pursue its human and community development mission.**

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<sup>6</sup> Harry C. Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 5.

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For us, I think the answer we are trying to give them is that we are one of the only organizations that focuses on quality of life issues. We are not reacting to each crisis. We are trying to build capacity in people and in communities. We serve as a facilitator, a link that can get people together, and as a result, things will move forward.

According to Andy, the “classic model of Extension is that it is a mechanism for disseminating the research-based knowledge of the faculty. I don’t think that we are doing a lot of that in that specific way.” Instead of research-based knowledge, he says that it is “the philosophy that we are extending, a philosophy that is born out of the land-grant system.” For Andy, this philosophy is based on a belief “that the quality of an endeavor is improved by combining local experiences, issues, and realities with some outside external perspective.” It is also based on a commitment to democracy. Speaking of CCE-Greene County’s work, Andy says: “We are not necessarily directing things to a certain outcome. We are interested in a democratic process where decisions and ideas include a diversity of people. That would be part of the philosophy too.”

The democratic process that is part of the philosophy that Andy says Extension is “extending” is not just a way to make decisions; it is a way for Extension to pursue its human and community development mission. Extension educators pursue this mission by providing opportunities for people to engage in meaningful public work. Such work includes gardening. As Sally Cunningham tells us in her profile,

Horticulture has a huge impact in community development. Let’s say you have a down-trodden, crime-ridden block with some empty lots. As soon as people come out and start building a garden in that lot and meeting on a regular basis, a change begins to occur. When people start coming out on the street, it brings out the best in some other people who can be attracted by that positive community energy. It also starts to make the area safer. It starts to be more attractive to a buyer of the empty house. Horticulture has a huge community rebuilding effect.

Such work also includes program development and community planning and visioning processes. In their profiles, Bob Beyfuss, Marilyn Wyman, Monika Roth, and Nancy Potter all speak of how they facilitate citizen engagement in these processes in ways that attend to the purpose of building local democracy. We learn something important about what this can involve and result in from each of these educators.

From Bob, who tells us that he often plays the role of a “cheerleader” who

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motivates engagement in public work by instilling a sense of pride in people about their communities, we learn that engagement in program planning can result in leadership development. As he tells us in his profile,

I love taking people that may start as a volunteer on a small sub-committee of a planning board, for example, and I watch these people develop as they realize that they can actually do things. The whole process of taking a person from a community and turning them into a leader is a wonderful thing. I think we do this well in Extension. We empower people. I don't particularly like that term, but I think it fits in this case: empowering local citizens to realize that they can make a difference. I think we all tend to be a little bit lazy, a little apathetic; we'll wait for somebody else to do it. If you can actually empower someone by convincing them that they can make a difference, then you've created something very powerful.

From Marilyn, we learn that the success of a community visioning process depends in large measure on the "kind of atmosphere and environment" facilitators create. Here is how she describes what she did to create an atmosphere during the first meeting of a community visioning process she facilitated in the Town of Cairo:

I created an overview about what needed to happen at that first meeting. I crafted an agenda that specifically talked about what their expectations were. I made assumptions about how the meeting should proceed. Instead of saying, "These are the guidelines we're going to deal with," I told them I assumed that "We're here to represent the best interests of the town of Cairo. We will speak in ways that help us achieve the broadest and deepest understanding rather than speaking to win debating points. We'll listen thoughtfully. We will assume that no one has the entire answer, that everyone is part of the answer and we'll come away from this with a recommendation to present to the Cairo town board."

From Monika, we learn that when educators deliberately organize planning committees in ways that include diverse interests and perspectives, they can contribute to the purpose of building local democracy. In her profile, she tells us that the agriculture program committee for CCE-Tompkins County used to include only representatives from agriculture. For a variety of reasons, she expanded the committee to include environmental and consumer interests as well. Now, she says, committee members

come together with many different agendas. It was much easier working with a strictly agriculture-based committee because there are more common-

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ties. It is even easier working with just one commodity, like the dairy producers. The challenge is that we have many stakeholders on our program committee with various interests. The benefit is that they learn from each other and we try to find common interests to work on. The farmers are learning that there is consumer support for agriculture, and the environmentalists are interested in what happens on farms. They are learning that they aren't completely antagonistic. As the program has evolved, we have included more stakeholders. It is a way for everyone involved to learn from each other.

From Nancy, we learn how a view of Extension's historical role in communities can inform and reinforce an educator's commitment to build local democracy. In her words:

Extension's role is to constantly be looking ahead at what the issues in the community are, to look for opportunities for an educational response, intervention, or some sort of education that can have an impact on an issue. It's all about figuring out what the goals of the community are, *with* the community. That is historically how I see Cooperative Extension's role. It's what we have carved out as our niche in the community. We bring research and practices together, so they can be part of local discussion and action.

Importantly, we learn that Nancy's thinking about her work as an educator has evolved over time:

Thinking back over my career to about ten years ago, I wonder: how did I look at my job back then? Some of it is the same, but a lot of it has evolved to this place of knowing that education can be about facilitating and learning versus the classic: "Here I am. I have some knowledge and I want to share it with you. I want to impart this knowledge to you because it could improve your life." What is a facilitator if she or he doesn't help some process happen? All I am doing is helping people discover each other's passions . . . .

Instead of just imparting knowledge as an expert in family and consumer science, Nancy's work as a skilled facilitator now also includes helping processes move forward and helping people discover each other's passions. But this is not all Nancy is doing when she is facilitating. A crucial part of her role in facilitating community visioning processes, she tells us,

is to say, "Who is missing from the table? Who is missing from this conversation?" or "Who else do we need to hear from?" Their voice is important in creating the future. For me, this is a premise for this kind of work. I think it is

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for most community developers. That is, to be able to look at who is not there and to be able to ask, “Whose voice is missing?”

Here, Nancy is showing us one of the ways “the simple facilitator role can be a catalyst,” as she puts it, for building local democracy.

## Significance


“I consider myself a catalyst,” Bob Beyfuss says in his profile. “A catalyst is something that speeds up a reaction that is probably going to happen anyway.” Speaking of his role in organizing the Agroforestry Resource Center (ARC), he says: “I basically helped a reaction that was going to occur, occur. I sped up the process.”

What Bob tells us here about his role in the ARC story may well be true. But like when Andy Turner said that Extension “allows” him to pursue his social change agenda, Bob is underplaying his leadership role in the ARC story. He is leaving something out that is key to answering the question I posed at the beginning of this essay about how we should understand the significance

of Extension educators’ work in contemporary society. We come to see what’s missing when we read Andy’s account of Extension’s role in the work of envisioning and organizing ARC. According to Andy, “Extension was the catalyst for this work; we were organizing this and conceiving of the idea and bringing all these groups together. *And then we were actually making it happen.*”

What we learn about Extension educators’ work by reading the profiles in this book isn’t that they help to speed up reactions that are probably going to occur anyway. Rather, it’s that they deliberately organize and facilitate people’s engagement in public work so that “reactions” that might *not* otherwise occur *will* occur. Instead of working from a responsive stance of neutrality, they work to facilitate learning and catalyze change from a proactive stance of commitment. The changes or “reactions” they seek to make happen are meant to advance their non-neutral commitments to sustainable development, respect and reverence for life, and local democracy. These are large and important purposes. When educators pursue them, it gives Extension a place of great significance in contemporary society.

Parker Palmer once wrote that “good teaching cannot be reduced to tech-



**The educators in this book encourage us to look beyond the information and expertise Extension provides in order to understand not only what Extension is and does, but also how and why it matters.**

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nique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”<sup>7</sup> The identity and the integrity of the teachers we meet in this book reflect a principled embrace of a set of values, ideals, and purposes that give their work a distinctive *public* significance. The public significance of their work includes its economic contributions and impact. This is no small matter in upstate New York communities, most of which have suffered a dramatic loss of jobs over the past several decades. But just as good teaching cannot be reduced to technique, the public significance of good Extension work cannot be reduced to economics. In fact, good Extension work holds public significance in large measure because it is about *more* than economics, particularly the unsustainable, materialist, inequitable, and bottom-line oriented economics that dominates contemporary American culture.

“It feels like Extension has always been against the tide of the notion that the market is above everything,” Andy says in his profile.

I see the driving influence of most things in our culture being economics, defined in a very narrow way. I think Extension’s mission now is to be part of helping society to change the way we look at measuring what is a healthy community, what is a healthy democracy. That is where I see us needing to go. . . . We are trying to teach people how to do deeper things. When I look at the planning departments and economic developers and even the Chamber of Commerce, they need education too, because it seems they still have a fairly shallow accounting. They are looking at bringing things in that carry jobs. They are not looking at the whole perspective.

Working against the tide of the narrowly defined economics that Andy sees as the driving influence of most things in our culture, Extension stands for “looking at the whole perspective.” We get a vivid account of this in the following passage from Rick Burstell’s profile:

We just had our big staff meeting the other day. It was all about our Extension mission and all the things that Cornell Cooperative Extension is going to be involved in here in Greene County. It was so impressive to me; it was all positive. When I was involved with private industry, we always had a graph on the wall with the numbers, and that was what it was all about. The only thing that mattered was the numbers. If the numbers were going up, everything was fine. It didn’t matter if everybody in the place was suffering or not; it was all about the numbers. Here we want to improve this community. We want to

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<sup>7</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of A Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 10.

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make the people in this community more informed. We want to help them to make the right decisions in their life. We want to teach them to have a healthier attitude, to eat healthier, to be healthier towards their neighbors, and to embrace and protect the beautiful natural environment that they have around them.

Reading this passage, I'm reminded again of Andy's line about Extension: "It's not just providing information." Not only Andy, but all of the educators in this book encourage us to look beyond the information and expertise Extension provides in order to understand not only what Extension is and does, but also how and why it matters. But in doing so, we must not overlook the deep importance of information and expertise. Here, we need to listen to what Sally Cunningham tells us in her profile:

I heard some discussion about how Extension educators aren't going to be the experts anymore in their content areas, but I don't agree with that. I think the content is the vehicle. It's what we get known for. It's why people come to us, whether it's the greenhouse expert or the dairy agent or the nutrition person or the gardening lady. They're going to come to us for the content, but when they do, they also get the larger life principles: learning how to learn, how to think, how to research, how to solve problems for themselves. They get a lot more than the quick answers in all of our content areas, but we still need the gardening as the lure to get them in the door. They're not going to come to a meeting on "How to be a Better Citizen." Nobody would come to meetings on that. But they come to a "Gardening in your Community" class, and pretty soon they're interacting with people they wouldn't have talked to before.

Extension matters and is significant not only or mainly because it has information and expertise, but rather because of how and for what purposes it brings people, information, and expertise together. The "best of gardening," Sally tells us in her profile, is "when it's much more than planting flowers." So, too, the best of Extension is when it's much more than providing information.

profiles



# profile

## Andy Turner

*Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Greene County*

I'm the executive director of the Cornell Cooperative Extension association in Greene County in the Catskills region of New York. I have been here since 1998, so I am coming up on my

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Scott Peters**

**September, 2003**

sixth year. Prior to that, I was with the Rockland County Extension association for nine years. I began there in 1989 in an entry-level 4-H youth development position. I was only a year out of my undergraduate degree from Cornell. It was a traditional 4-H position, but they were interested in natural resources as well as public

policy and local government, things that I had an interest in. I was a natural resource major at Cornell. At the time, I was working in Washington, D.C. as an intern at the Sierra Club. It was a non-paid position to get involved in policy and natural resource issues. At night, I was also working at the National 4-H Council backing up their computers.

Being an Extension association director is essentially like being the CEO of a small nonprofit organization or a small business. I am the person who is overall in charge of our physical status, the programs that we put out, our products, our mission, making sure that we are doing what is relevant. We have a board of directors. All of the associations are governed by locally elected boards of directors, so I work with them. I provide leadership to the staff. It is basically the whole gamut of administrative responsibilities that you would have with any nonprofit organization.



# profile

## Andy Turner \_\_\_\_\_

We have total staff of around fifteen; a number of those people are part-time. It is changing right now because of some grants that are up in the air. Seven people who fit a traditional Extension educator role. We have around one hundred volunteers. Our budget is approximately \$900,000. Our programs fit into three major areas: youth, agriculture and natural resources, and family and community issues. That's an evolution from what I started with here. In each area, we have these plans of work phases; we are coming near the end of one, and things are going to change. We are about to take the next step where things become very issue-oriented and very, very non-departmentalized. We are already much closer to that than a lot of the associations are.

Our budget has only about three or four categories that are of major importance. The county funds the core piece that supports everything else; that is about \$280,000. The state funds \$60,000 through County Law 224, and Cornell provides benefits. The third big area is grants and contracts. I would say about 40 percent of our total revenue is from the local community, another 30 to 40 percent is through grants and contracts. It is much smaller pieces after that, with the state money, some program-generated money, and some fund raising.

County Law 224 provides direct funding to the county associations through the SUNY system. Federal funds also come to the county associations, and both have essentially been flat for a long time. In our case, we have essentially doubled our budget since I started in 1998. The majority of that has come through new funding streams like state grants. However, we started to feel a little nervous about that growth so we did a lot of work on the balance of funding projections. We have come to a conclusion that we don't want the grants and contracts to become larger than local funding. Our operating principle is that we rely on local funds to maintain our flexibility to pursue our mission so we can work on what we need to work on based on the community's needs. A grant does not have that same flexibility. If you get too heavily weighted in the grants, you lose your ability to be flexible and move on to new issues.

Our mission is a community development mission, and we bring to that something different than any other organization in Greene County. The Extension model is to create educational programs that address community needs. It mixes local concerns and local values with the values and expertise that come through the

**Over time, we should see how a community, not just individuals, is different as a result of Extension programs. It's not just providing information.**

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land-grant college. I see it as an equal kind of mixing. As a result, you have a more balanced program that has an opportunity to lead to real impacts and changes in the community. For me, the ultimate goal is that our programs should, at some level, be directed at changes in the community. Over time, we should see how a community, not just individuals, is different as a result of Extension programs. It's not just providing information. The community is now in a different place because of this on-going work that we are doing.

I think that we need to fundamentally change the way our society works, and how we interact with the natural world around us. I think that the model that we currently function under has become so focused on economic development, over and above everything else, that it doesn't include any accounting for impacts on water and air and health and communities. It is not sustainable. It is not an accurate depiction of the health of communities, landscapes, or human beings. My passion right now is to apply through our Extension mission a way to change how we live, to look at our economic system in a different way, to bring in values that we don't seem to account for, such as the health of the landscape, the quality of life in communities, the level of participation in community events and the health of our democracy. That is what I am really into. Extension allows you to pursue that.

I grew up in western New York State in Livingston County, in the Genesee river valley. It is an agricultural community. Rochester is the closest metropolitan area. My father was with the county Extension; he was the county coordinator. So I was exposed to rural issues and agriculture and Extension early on. When I was a kid, we would always have to stop in the Extension office, and there were certain things about it that stuck with me. I remember the interface of all the information that was there and that it was in this community where I lived. Everything said "Cornell." People were there to learn. It was interesting. I still remember walking around the office and seeing the various educational pamphlets everywhere, the models of horses and all the stuff that was in this place that was different. It wasn't like a library; it wasn't like a school. It was here in our community, and people came there to learn things. It definitely left an impression that stuck with me.

I was always very interested in nature, from two years old and up. I was just interested in what was going on in my backyard. Growing up in a rural area, I got to be intimately involved with the animals. I think that everything else has come from that. I just went out and started exploring and catching things and studying them and having zoos on the front porch. My parents were very open to letting me continue to do whatever the interest was, so I didn't get any negative messages about it and continued to go into that more.

Certainly being in the 4-H club didn't hurt because it provided some structure

# profile

## Andy Turner \_\_\_\_\_

for some of those activities like entomology. I don't think 4-H was a big factor, but I was encouraged in the natural interests that I had, and so I continued to take them further. Both my parents influenced me because they didn't impose expectations on what kind of things I should be interested in. That was the same with my brother and sister. We were allowed to pursue what we wanted, and they would support it. I had friends who had similar interests. That allowed me to have partners in developing some of these things.

Leicester is the name of the town where I was raised. It was an ideal community to grow up in. Even though it was a rural area, I was in the village. I was born in '66, so the seventies really were the key times. Leicester, which is right near Geneseo and SUNY-Geneseo College, was a little tiny village. I had houses around me, so there were other kids around. I didn't have to be driven anywhere. I just had to go out on my doorstep, and the kids would show up. There were a lot of other children around my age. A lot of them were older, so I was thrown into things with older kids, which I think was helpful to me in a lot of ways. I had access to a lot of natural areas. We had a creek near by, Little Beards Creek, which probably had the biggest influence on me. I spent tons of time there. At that time, there was a lot of freedom. There didn't appear to be any concerns that I was out there doing things. I was outside in the summer all day long. I came into eat and went back. That was it, and no one was concerned. There were places that we could ride our bikes, places to have adventures everywhere. There was a baseball field within a couple of minutes walk. The creek. We would go off for hours on end exploring or fishing or whatever. So I had tons of stimulation and exposure to many different kids and to other adults who were all essentially positive people for the most part. It was just a very free place, but still safe. I don't know if kids have that now or not. Maybe they do, but I am not sure that they do.

I was into sports in high school. I could have played sports in some small colleges, but I realized that was not a viable option for the future. I was interested enough in science and the environmental issues that I decided that I wanted to pursue that. That led me to some different options. My high school grades, in math particularly, were borderline for Cornell. So I went to SUNY-Cobleskill because they had a fishery and wildlife technology program that I knew could potentially provide me with a career option after two years. I also left open further possibilities. All I knew for sure at that time is that I was interested in the general area of biology and environmental science.

SUNY-Cobleskill was good. I came from a very small high school, and that is still a small college. I had a good balance of wanting to experience some different things that I hadn't experienced in high school with enough of a desire to succeed.

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I was able to stay focused. There were a lot of kids there who were clearly just not concerned about where they went next. I did well enough academically to transfer to Cornell, but I also had a lot of fun. It was a fairly good balance there. I also realized that the real tech end of wildlife wasn't for me. I wasn't going to be a conservation officer or a biology technician. I knew that wasn't it. I don't think that I knew what it was, but I did know that more college was going to be required to figure that out.

That led me to Cornell, to the College of Agriculture, with a focus on natural resources. That was a very broad program. There were three big influences at Cornell. First, I ended up joining a fraternity by accident. My cousin was there, and he was looking to add some people to it. That had a whole social context that made a big difference in my life. Second, I took a five credit genetics class in my first semester and dropped it very quickly. It was the ultimate moment of "You are not a scientist." The third influence was taking an intersession course called "politics and policies

**I think that the model that we currently function under has become so focused on economic development, over and above everything else, that it doesn't include any accounting for impacts on water and air and health and communities.**

of natural resources" at the Cornell Center in Washington D.C. during my second year. We learned about the Sierra Club and Greenpeace and how these nonprofit groups go about trying to influence the direction of national policy on the environment. I was ready to work for Greenpeace or the Sierra Club or somebody like that. In fact, that is what led me to Washington four or five months after I graduated. I started thinking that this could be the place for me to go. I am not a scientist.

I am more of a big picture person. I am more interested in the human dimensions and the policy issues around these things.

After I finished at Cornell, I didn't have a job. There were no positions that were interesting to me. I did go to a meeting with one of the Cooperative Extension representatives. We talked about Extension, and I got my name on a list. I wasn't particularly interested based on that experience, but Dr. Harlan Brustead, in the Department of Natural Resources said to me, "You know, you should consider this." I think he saw Extension as a good place for me to go. He ended up being right, but not at the time. At that time, it didn't seem to me like there were positions in Extension that related to what I was moving toward, the policy of natural resources.

My parents had just sold their house in Leicester and built a home in New

# profile

## Andy Turner \_\_\_\_\_

Hampshire where my mother's parents were from. So I was up there for a while without a certain future. I was doing landscaping and helping them out. I just decided that I had to do something, so I sent letters to some of these groups in Washington, and I received an offer to be an intern at the Sierra Club for no pay. I said, "Well, I had better do that." Then I decided on a whim to call the National 4-H Center and see if they might have housing. That led to an opportunity to live there for free and work as a back-up person on the computers at night. So that got me to Washington. I was doing that work and found it fascinating. I was putting myself in the places where I could get a position with a Congressperson or in one of the organizations.

It was 1988, during the first Bush/Dukakis presidential election, and it was an amazing experience. But it just didn't seem like the whole me was going to work in that environment. I started to miss aspects of a more rural life. I wasn't totally into the urban lifestyle. I saw how those folks worked eighty hours a week; that is all that they did. Unbelievable dedication, but also no real balance. Something was saying, "You need to go hiking. You need to fish. You need to be able to play golf." I was seeking more of a balanced existence. Then the Rockland County Extension position description came through. In the three-sentence description, it said "natural resources" and it said "government." I applied for the position, got an interview, was offered the position and took it. My options were limited at that time. I was in Washington only about seven months.

Kermit Graff was the director when I got to Rockland County. He is one of the more innovative people in our system. It was clear to me right from the first day that he had a vision for this association. He had a plan, and I had an opportunity to be part of that. I had a sense that there was passion and energy in this building, and so I jumped right into it. But, although I was loving the youth work and I was developing new programs in natural resources, I was also in a lower-level position. I wasn't part of the management team that would go in and have these meetings. I quickly didn't like that; I wanted to be part of that team. I wanted to be part of making those decisions. I knew that I had to be in that room. *Had* to. I realized fairly quickly that I needed a Master's degree in order to go anywhere in this organization.

In '91 and '92, I went back to Cornell to do an MPS [Master of Professional Studies] degree. So I jumped into that, and then went back to Rockland County. Unfortunately, Kermit left only about a year and a half after I was there. So that left some shifts. With my degree, I was able to influence the re-design of that association, and I liked that. We created new positions; one of them was going to be for an environmental program. That was my opportunity, and I got that position.

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I became what, in the old structure, we would call a program leader, but we called it an issue leader. I had several staff to supervise, and the focus was environmental quality in Rockland County. We created new advisor groups that brought in agencies that worked on those issues, and we developed new programs. The position gave me a platform to be one of the people in the county who would always be involved in some kind of environmental subject. I was really enjoying that, and the work that we were doing was having some impacts. That opened up some other doors that led me more to the community development approach of Extension work. Some issues, like the Canada geese, were controversial. There was a huge population explosion of Canada geese because it was a perfect environment for them, green lawns, water and no predators. I was asked to get involved in helping to figure out what we were going to do, which got me into public issues education. I learned a lot from that experience. It wasn't altogether positive, but I knew that I liked it. I saw that there was a role Extension could be playing. It could be facilitating these kinds of things, bringing the right people together and making sure that really good things would happen as opposed to just some smaller political solution.

I came to Greene County for a combination of personal and professional reasons. Rockland County was not an easy place to live. It was so close to New York City that the cost of living was astronomical. I was close to getting married. I was thinking, "Can we go somewhere else in the state where the cost of living or lifestyle is a little more convenient to someone in this kind of work?" The other reason was that I started to develop the capacity and interest in the administrative issues. I was also involved in a lot of things on campus. I started to become an advocate within the system for breaking out of what I called "stovepipes" of Extension. I found that in doing the environmental program, I didn't have a place within the system. There was no network for those of us doing this type of work.

I began to take on a lot of statewide roles and advisory committees. I was involved in trying to start this new professional organization that would be more open. Locally, I started to have more difficulty with some of the decision-making that I saw from the executive directors. We had several people after Kermit left who didn't really work out, and I realized that I had to put up or shut up. I started thinking that I could have the most influence, not only on my own work but also on the system, if I moved toward an executive director position. So I decided that I really needed to look into that. I wanted to go to a place that was not gigantic, where I thought that I could actually make a difference in the community through the association. It seemed difficult in Rockland County to do that. They had already become this really suburban, sprawled-out place, so to work on the issues that I was most interested in I would have needed to go back in time. Greene County was

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appealing because I knew that the association had gone through a very difficult time; they weren't in great shape. I figured that I would rather go somewhere where it was clear that we needed to make some changes, rather than just inheriting something that everyone wants to continue as is. It is a place that looked very desirable to live, so it just fit all of those criteria. I knew that there were a lot of natural resources there, and that we could be potentially working on those issues. I went and visited. I drove around and I decided, "Yeah, this could work," and so I threw my name in there.

In the interview, I could tell that certain things that I was saying were resonating with the staff and the board members. I was reading a lot of Peter Senge's work at that time, and I was really into his "fifth discipline." I used that as a model for how I would go about this type of position. I would start from scratch and try to build a certain kind of leadership style. I think those are the things that they responded to. They wanted someone who was going to focus on the big issues and create a different structure and a different system for making decisions. I think the other two candidates were local people. I am not sure, but I think that the fact that I had been in Extension already and had some name recognition was another factor.

From the interim director, I got the sense that there were a number of issues that were unresolved; there was desire for change, and the relationships with the county legislature weren't good. The general sense that I got was that the people who were there were talented, but things had fallen around them. I am not sure if that was the message they wanted to send, but that is what I picked up. When I was offered the position, there wasn't any clear idea of what was expected. It was more like, "Come in and help us, please. We are going to be behind you, and we don't expect any immediate dramatic changes." That was the message.

I came in with an idea of how I was going to do it. I essentially followed that. I had a well-developed idea probably six months before then: if I was going to take a position like this, here is what I would do. It started out with an interview process, data gathering. I sat down with each staff person individually and took them through the same questions. I made it clear that I was just gathering information about things that I wanted to figure out. I said, "I have a basic idea in mind of how I think that this could work, or what I would like to do, but I need to hear it from all of you." I extended that out to some other folks too, some board members, as well as some other department heads who were in key roles, like the youth bureau director. It was unbelievable to me how frank people were. I still go back and look at those interviews occasionally because they really told me things that I needed to know, and they were honest. I used all of that information gathering as a rationale for

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creating a vision from my vision. I unleashed that on the staff and the board. I said, “Here is what I have heard, and here is what I think.” Then they reacted to that.

One of the things I had heard was that the process for making decisions wasn’t well understood or respected, and we needed to create one that people could at least understand. Another one was that the programs needed to be updated and revised. We needed to be more focused on the issues in the community and less on the programs that we have always done. That was clear, probably more so from the community members than it was from the staff, but certainly from some of the staff as well. The other category of things I heard was about the culture; the organization was very down and very defeated. It needed to be revitalized and have some successes. We needed some new things to get people going again. We needed a new culture, and we needed a vision. There was not a big picture. It was just a collection of people who do programs. Nobody really knew what it all added up to. So that was

**There was not a big picture. It was just a collection of people who do programs. Nobody really knew what it all added up to.**

something that I focused on very quickly. We needed to focus on a vision. We needed to tell people what we are trying to do with this effort.

It was challenging because a lot of the board members were new. I never really wanted to dwell on the details, but Greene County was not perceived

well within the system of Extension. It wasn’t looked at as a place where anything innovative was going on. The relationships with the legislature were poor. But the good news was some key county leaders really did understand what Extension could do and knew that this was something that they wanted. They didn’t want to lose this program. It is not a rich county. It is a small rural county. They need the resources. I think that even though they weren’t happy with things, they were happy with some people in some programs. They understood that they needed Extension and that Extension could help them. The staff, for the most part, were also willing to do something different. I didn’t have to convince anyone that we needed to change. People knew that this wasn’t working, and they were open to hearing whatever I had to say. A lot of the board members were just learning what Extension is, so there was a great opportunity for them to join in with whatever I said. They weren’t coming out of a model of “We always do this, this and this.” They were learning about the organization, so it was an easier environment to change than I think some people come in to.

A lot of the vision was from me; there is no question about that. I had clearly decided that Extension as an organization needed to go in a different direction

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before I came in. We needed to be much more focused on community issues and process, rather than on the specific things that we do. So I just started talking about that. This came from my own experiences within Rockland County. It came from seeing, in Greene County when I got there, how divided the different groups were. It was like there was a department approach to it. I couldn't see how those programs in any way were holistic, how together were they working with a whole community. They were just things that we did. How I got to these new ideas partially had to do with graduate school. I was in the Education Department at Cornell. I got a lot of different ideas about what Extension could be through that, with participatory action research being one of the things that I was exposed to.

There were only thirteen staff members when I got to Greene County, and the budget was \$300,000 total. The capacity to do a whole lot of anything was difficult, so it was maintenance. We were a place where people could find answers to questions about horticulture and very basic agriculture. We had a very small 4-H program with the same people involved. There were a few peripheral things to the clubs that they did, and that was a small group of people. There was one half-time person, who was doing consumer science, human ecology, but there was no nutrition program. We didn't have EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program] at that time. There was a small amount of programming, basically in those three traditional areas, and they weren't overlapping at all.

**The programs are the mechanism; they are not the mission. I came in with that theory.**

There were program committees, one for each of those things. I had theories and ideas about whether this was the right way to do things. I went to the program committee meetings, and I saw they were the people who were then being put on the board. They had a couple of at-large board members. It just didn't seem like there was anything going on at the meetings. It was basically staff reporting on what they were doing and people saying, "Oh, that sounds good." It just left me feeling cold and that this wasn't enough.

I didn't think that the departmentalized approach—the governance being program committees around these programs—was going to work, that it was the best way to achieve our objectives as an organization.

Somehow the mission had become certain programs over the years. I felt like it was restricting what we did. It was self-replicating and wasn't going to take us where I wanted us to go. Instead, the mission should be the changes in the community that we are about, bringing together the right kind of mix of information and

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people to create better communities. That is the mission. The programs are the mechanism; they are not the mission. I came in with that theory. One of the reasons that I took the position was so I could act on it.

Greene County is largely rural, very small towns of no more than 10,000 people. The whole county is only 50,000 people. It is in the mid-Hudson and upper-Hudson valley, the western side of the Hudson River just south of Albany, New York. Several historical towns like Catskill, Witsocki and Athens are right along the Hudson River. Because we are in the northern Catskills, it is mountainous and not a traditional agricultural dairy farming community. It is a tourism site and a historically significant cultural area. It is where Rip Van Winkle was written. It is where the Hudson River School of Painters were painting. It was a tourist destination for New York City. The Hudson River day-liner came up from New York City and docked in Greene County. People took a train up to the Catskill Mountain House up in Palenville, which was the place to be in this country for a long time.

The transition from that is still ongoing. But people are now discovering that it has changed dramatically just since I have been there. For whatever reason, people are rediscovering it and appreciating it; many of the things that have happened in other communities in upstate New York just never happened here. We have no big-box stores. The infrastructure is not that advanced. Essentially, the issue in Greene County is economic development without messing up this beautiful rural environment that we have. We have tremendous natural resources, 85 percent forested land, which is among the highest in the state. It has 19 percent of the New York City watershed, a major issue. It has Mountaintop. So it is an interesting place that doesn't really have an identity other than we call it Greene County. The way that it is divided up doesn't even make sense; there are very different communities, very different towns.

What I saw was that the issue here is the economy, the combination of economic development with natural resource protection. For Extension, we needed to change our structure in order to become involved on the issues that really mattered the most to the county. There is no way that the three-program-area approach could add up to become a major player in the big issue. It just doesn't work that way.

I used the opening six months as a way to create a new vision and get people involved in that process enough so that they felt like they were part of it. That seemed to succeed. The board members who were new were thinking the same way. They were community people. They hadn't been directly involved in the club program or the agriculture program so they could go that route. There were a couple of farmers, but they were a very diverse group of folks, some of them very new to the county, who were looking at ways to get involved with an organization that could

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work around the entire county. I think a couple of them were Cornell graduates or had some connection to Cornell. They saw enough of an interest in what our mission was that they were willing to get involved. Some of them were leadership-type people, but because they were new to the county or a little different in some ways, they weren't easily plugged into other leadership places. This became a place where they could get involved in the community, easier, quicker. A couple of them have really taken off and now are about to move off the board. One is running for town council. Another one went on to be very active in the statewide Extension board and become a player in marketing the system. He really got into it and understands what we are trying to do. I think that some of them really developed some leadership as a result of being on our board.

I am not 100 percent sure of the sequence, but we totally changed the governance system. I created a leadership team within the staff that made decisions, so we were all together in the same room. We got rid of the program committees. We took them out of the bylaws and created an at-large board. Some of changes were driven by changes that were already taking place in the system. Cornell was saying that we needed to look at our bylaws. They were coming from the vision that I helped create. Other people were bonding to things, which included ideas like "We need to work with other community organizations more; we need to partner with them. We need most people in the county to understand what Extension is about." We had specific, bulleted things that we wanted to do. The broad vision was that, through our programs, we would build stronger, healthier families and enhance and improve the agriculture and natural resources. The programs were supposed to lead to those outcomes. There were more specific operational things under that like "We've got to work together more; we have got to work with other community members more."

Then we did a whole bunch of organizational culture work to deal with the issues that were there among the staff. We created a value statement and expectations for how we would work together. That took a long time, but it carried us a long way in terms of working together more effectively. Then we started looking for new programs. I went to the Youth Bureau director and said, "It seems like Extension never works with you." She said, "You are right. All they are doing is the club programs. I don't really see how much that is benefiting that many children." She just started saying these things. A week later, I went back and she said, "Here you go," and she threw a grant at me—it was for an after-school program—and said, "Why don't we do this?" So we wrote it, and we got the money. All of a sudden, we had an influx of new resources to do something that fit more with this new approach. Before that, the Youth Bureau and Extension weren't talking at all. They

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didn't like each other. I think Extension was perceived as a group that did certain things, and they just did those things. They weren't really a collaborator on new things. That was definitely the same kind of thing that existed with other agencies, too.

Then, realizing that some staff would be harder to change right away, I just decided that we needed to get some money in here. We became involved in EFNEP again. That led to another, the FISNET program. We got some influxes of resources that allowed us to put on some new staff and do some other things, and that made a big difference. That gave us some momentum. People could say, "There is something to this; this makes sense."

The relationships with the county elected officials who foot a good portion of the bill were aided by the fact that there was a new face. I tried to be very positive with them and they gave me a lot of leeway just based on that. They wanted to support Extension. They provided more funding the first three to four years that I was there; we got an increase in funding each year. I think the economy was doing well everywhere at that time. That helped, but also there was a new approach. They had high respect for some of the staff who were already there, and that helped. I had a couple of staff people who were very good at marketing. They understood the importance of the local legislatures and would go out of their way to do things

to help them out. We went to meetings all the time, but we also went with specific presentations and tried to portray, "Here is what we are doing; here is why it is important to you." Some of the other organizations in a small community don't have as many resources or aren't as organized as we are.

**We are trying to build capacity in people and in communities. We serve as a facilitator, a link that can get people together, and as a result, things will move forward.**

I think the officials could see how the investment was leading to things, and that made a difference too. I don't know if a lot of them think about what they are getting out of it. A lot of them just look at it, and it is something that was in the budget when they got there. I wish they would think about it more as an investment. I think that they will start to because we are seeing a lot of new people in the legislature. In the past, it was the farmers on the land. They had the money, they were on the boards, and so they understood. That is changing. I think it creates an opportunity for us to answer the question of why the public should support Extension, because I think people are starting to ask that more. We should have an answer ready. For us, I think the answer we are trying to give them is that we are one of the only organizations that focuses on quality of

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life issues. We are not reacting to each crisis. We are trying to build capacity in people and in communities. We serve as a facilitator, a link that can get people together, and as a result, things will move forward. We are trying to show them specific examples of where we are doing that and how and what it is leading to. That does have an effect. I wish that I could say that because we are becoming more oriented toward that type of work, it creates a solid, safe funding foundation for us. I don't know if that is true. I am not sure there is any connection.

We try to show them the economic side too. The things we have been working on lately are focused on economic development. But we are also trying to be upfront and say, "Look, you need to consider the resources and the landscape. These are all parts of economic development. It's not just creating jobs." We are not trying to say that we are just an economic development organization. We want to show our piece of this in relation to what the economic development office is doing and what the planning office is doing. We are trying to say, "The landscape and protecting agriculture and how that connects to the tax base and how that leads to tourism dollars are also important." We are trying to show how, if you have eighty-five percent forested land, you could teach landowners ways to grow ginseng or mushrooms or log it in a way that is sustainable and that doesn't impact on health or water quality. There is nobody else doing that kind of thing in our local community. They are starting to see that these things have a bearing on economic development. Then there are just dollars and cents kinds of impacts that we can show them, too, including the value of what they get with Extension. Even if you compare it to county aid departments, they get more out of us. The reality is they are getting more for their money with Extension than any other local organization because of the matching dollars and just how hard we work and the amount of time we put in.

When I came in with my ideas, there was some resistance, but not as much as you might expect. I think that it partially has to do with the county not being a huge agriculture county. We didn't have a huge 4-H club program. There is resistance to some of the change, no question. I just get a general sense that people are asking, "Where is he going with this?" We have had enough successes that we are way too far down the track to be stopped. I would say the resistance has shown up more in the way that the very traditional 4-H leaders have a sense that everything is about 4-H and that we shouldn't be doing any other programs. Or they see the community changing in general, and it is a stressful thing, and then they see Extension—something that has always been the same—is changing too. It hasn't been any kind of unified movement. I think that Greene County is different than a lot of communities because of the nature of where we are, the history of it. We never had

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800 kids in 4-H clubs or 200 dairy farms. The fact that I had an Extension background seemed to make some difference, too, and maybe that I have done it fairly slow. I would say I think that we are now probably sixty-five percent of where we need to be. It is not like we are anywhere near there yet. It is still very much an ongoing process.

Changing the internal and board structure was part of moving things forward. The staff getting engaged in this was also important. A lot of them bought into it. We have staff who have embraced this kind of work and see this as the way we should be doing things. They have changed and are oriented the same way. Getting a position in agriculture economic development was important too. We were able to get some outside funding to support this. The person brought an interesting perspective to the work and helped to create the momentum to get us going with an agriculture farmland protection effort, which had never happened in Greene County. He started meeting with people and talking about it. Over time, it started to move forward. He is doing a lot of work with what he calls the “homecomers.” This includes a lot of folks coming from urban areas buying large pieces of land. He is working with a whole different sort of people, and it is all around the landscape, the use of the land, and educating people about tax issues and the multiplier affects of agriculture.

This is different than working with the standard kind of Extension approach with large producers because you are right in there. It’s more about the landscape and how it is being utilized. That is one piece. Another one would be the work that we are trying to do in what we are calling the forested environment. We have created a new satellite center, which is opening next week, called the Agroforestry Resource Center. This will be a distance-learning classroom. There is a huge coalition of organizations involved. We are looking to create a place for education, dialogue, and research around agroforestry, around its potential to contribute to economic development in ways that preserve the landscape. We want to educate people about “What can you do? What are the possibilities here? What are the values of the forest and landscape that you are not taking into account?” Things like human health impacts and water quality impacts have dollars and cents value. Then, personally (and I am more nervous about going on this road), I would like to explore the spiritual aspects of it: “What does it do to you? What is the value of being able to live in this place where you are surrounded by forest all the time?” So we are going into that area, and I don’t think that would have grown out of the old structure; it just didn’t fit.

A staff member, Bob Beyfuss, was already doing work in that area out of interest and passion but with a different vision and a different approach; we provided a

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different context. I didn't try to say, "No, you shouldn't be doing that; you should be doing this." Instead I said, "Well, let's work," and now it has taken us into a whole new area and a whole different approach to it. There were several of us inside of the organization who were interested in this. We were having lots of discussions about, "How can we do this?" We don't have the resources, or the kind of the office, or even the space to do what we do what we need to do to really take this agroforestry to another level and have a place where people can come and learn and do research and connect with Cornell.

A small core group ended up bringing in a number of stakeholders who had an interest in agroforestry issues. We did a visioning session, which led to a business plan and an application to be one of the statewide regional learning centers. We didn't get that funding. They only funded two places. But we just kept on going. We did get the distance-learning grant from Cornell for the technology piece. Then we just started shopping our business plan around. It was Marilyn Wyman, myself and Bob, but the plan was based on input from a lot of stakeholder groups. We had a meeting with our state senator. That was the key moment. He bought into it and supported it at \$50,000. Then we were able to get some additional funding from the Watershed Agriculture Council (WAC), which is a regional group focused on the New York City watershed. We received enough money to take the space that we had and turn it into a usable educational facility. That is where we are now, and classes are beginning there. Now we are looking to take the next step and bring all the

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partners back in again and say, "Now what?" Extension was the catalyst for this work; we were organizing this and conceiving of the idea and bringing all these groups together. And then we were actually making it happen. Marilyn has been saying, "Go for it. Go for it!"

I got into the Extension system because of the Cornell part of it. That is what made it interesting to me. You had a connection to the land-grant university. There was a big system, and there was science and research behind it. Through my work in Rockland County, I was able to work with faculty a lot and get to know people. I came in to Greene County thinking that the Cornell part has to be a part of it. In the visioning process, one of the things that came out was that we need to work more with Cornell. The relationship was not good when I came in. There wasn't

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much going on with Cornell. Bob Beyfuss was the exception. He was the agriculture program leader in the “stovepipe” model, but his real interest was in agroforestry. He had developed this passion for ginseng in his Master’s program at Cornell. Some people at Cornell were interested in what he was doing. So there was a little remnant there, which grew, and there were some board members who were Cornell alumni and had a sense that “Yeah, we really are supposed to work with Cornell. That is a part of this, and that is not really here.” So it has been built back.

I don’t know why the relationship with Cornell wasn’t there. I think that it has to do with the phenomenon of our system. We are funded locally so that just starts to dominate; neither side is reaching out enough. It is not built into your job enough. No one is saying, “Where is Cornell? Where is Cornell?” But I definitely saw that as a value, and others did too. We started to intentionally think about ways to recreate it, and I would say that now we have a lot of connections. I certainly had my own relationships with people and brought that value. I think that it was probably obvious to the other staff that it is important to me that we are part of Cornell. I made it clear that it was okay to be involved on committees and to be doing things that took you to Cornell. It was probably that and partly because we started doing different things. Certain faculty become more interested in the association because all of a sudden there was some work going on here that was of interest to them. Some of the interest was in the parenting program, some in our after-school program, quite a lot in agroforestry.

As we have gotten into the idea of community capacity building, there has been a lot of interest from CaRDI (Cornell’s Community and Rural Development Institute). We have been willing to try new programs, and we have been willing to be a guinea pig for certain kinds of programs. Things have just changed a little bit at a time. I would like to think that Greene County now has a very different sort of image within the Extension system and with faculty at Cornell than what we had before. But we certainly have a lot of direct working relationships with faculty now.

The classic model of Extension is that it is a mechanism for disseminating the research-based knowledge of the faculty. I don’t think that we are doing a lot of that in that specific way. It is more like we have identified a community need, for example, that there needs to be some more after-school programs for youth. Because we are Extension, we are going to look to see if there is a partner or there is a resource through the system that can help us to do that. It is the philosophy that we are extending, a philosophy that is born out of the land-grant system.

You can’t solve the problems of communities in a vacuum. You can’t just say, “Here is what you do.” You can’t just send somebody out to the farm or to the community and say, “Here is the way that you deal with this issue,” and then go

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back. You also can't have communities in isolation just getting together. They will come up with ideas, and they will do things. But the way that I think of it is that we are somehow combining the university and the community. Maybe the educator has had training or has had contacts or exposure to the Extension methodology, and that's the Extension part. Sometimes the educator brings a certain way of doing the work that is different than another agency might. It might be simply that. In other cases, it might be where a faculty person is actually doing research in Greene County, and that is different than doing it on campus or somewhere else, so they are bringing that experience back to influence the way that they do their work.

This is not happening, but I think it could. The agroforestry program is realizing it in a more regional way. But I think that some of the things that we are most interested in are not high on the value scale of the college. Even in the agroforestry area, where we have a tremendous amount of interest, there was a proposal from a couple of faculty to seek a grant through an Assemblyman who wants to explore creating a medicinal herb industry in New York State as a way to help rural communities. Some Cornell faculty were interested in applying for that, and the message that they got was no. So we are doing it through our agroforestry association. If we were able to get the funds, then we would contract with the faculty, which is a different way of doing it. I don't know why things go that way; sometimes what is important on one side is not important on the other. The system is not seamless at this point, but I think that the philosophy is still valid, and that is what I was using.

I believe that the quality of an endeavor is improved by combining local experiences, issues, and realities with some outside external perspective. Sometimes we can't provide that external perspective as we are right in there in that community. But there is also the facilitative aspect. We are not necessarily directing things to a certain outcome. We are interested in a democratic process where decisions and ideas include a diversity of people. That would be part of the philosophy too.

A professor from Cornell may be able to provide some facts, things that you should know when you are making this decision: "There is a health impact from this. ... We have some data on land application of sewage sludge that somebody should be looking at before you create this policy. ... We have been doing tests on purple loosestrife in Geneva, and it looks there may be a biological control; would you want to try that in this situation?" There are hundreds of different examples of how research and other experiences should be part of that decision making process. It should be in the mix. This separates it from just local politics or even strict economic decision-making, which sometimes dominates. Keeping science and research as part of the equation is something that is in our mission. I don't see that in the missions of a lot of the organizations that have an influence on how communities

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work. There is little indication of that, but it is a value that is part of the equation. We keep it in there. Even if it is not quite where we want it to be, it is part of the mix.

I think what people are learning through our work is education in the framework of transformational learning, where people are being educated at key moments in their lives. If it is a parenting educator who is working with a single mom, she is not coming in and saying, “Today we are going to do A, B, C, and D, and you are going to then know how to take care of F. You are going to know how to properly discipline your child.” It is more of a two-way conversation where the educator is going to be learning something, too. The educator is going to be listening to this person and what is going on in their life. So in that lesson, if you will, forty to fifty percent of it is going to be peripheral to the objectives that are in your grant. But it

**I think what people are learning through our work is education in the framework of transformational learning, where people are being educated at key moments in their lives.**

is just as important because if you don’t have that kind of interaction or that kind of listening to what their life is all about for the first fifteen minutes, chances are the thing that you are about to try to teach them is not going to work. It is not going to hold. It is education in that kind of more personal way that I think can create a larger impact on people and also requires the educator to learn at the same time.

They are probably going to do it differently down the road. They are going to understand their community better because of doing this for two years. To me, it is not just about the people we are talking with, it is about the educators themselves and what is happening with them as they are engaged in this process. It can be very specific things like, “Here is what you do about that pest problem,” but it happens in a way that is deeper and more grounded in the community. And it has impact on both the learner and the educator. And as a result, they are hopefully going to change the way they do their job.

This happens a lot in nutrition and the parenting programs where you have people one-on-one in their homes. Educators really get to know them, and they can see that kind of impact. I am not there watching that, but I hear about it, and I can see how the educators are changing in those roles. I don’t know how many people really get this because some people really want to just give out all the answers. We still do that, but it is a whole picture. I think the people that do that see the larger perspectives on this. I think they realize that they don’t really want to give the

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answer. They want to engage them in a discussion and find out what their situation is. If you give an answer too quickly, you may not even know what the question is yet.

For example, our educator who interacts with the public on issues like pesticide use and Lyme disease gets that. As a result, there is a different kind of interaction that takes place other than “Here is your fact sheet.” It might be ten minutes into the conversation before that happens. I think we have people who see that role and aren’t really looking to deliver an answer quickly. Also, the community member’s objective may be totally different than what the question would seem to imply. For example, they might be really looking to create a wildlife sanctuary as opposed to figuring out the best way to do up a forestry management plan. Your initial thought might be, “Oh, this person just needs to go get a forester in there.” So you tell them “Here is what you do over ten years.” If you talk longer, you might realize that what they really want to do is create an environment on their property that attracts turkeys and deer, and therefore, maybe they don’t need to do anything. But if there wasn’t a longer conversation, you wouldn’t even know that.

The highest stage that we are trying to achieve should be community change. We should be thinking about that when we are developing our programs and trying to find ways that they tie together. Is nutrition education somehow tied to our larger goal of preserving local agriculture and getting people involved in farming or vegetable gardening? We aren’t just delivering a nutrition lesson to somebody, and that is it. Well, sometimes, maybe that’s it. But can we get all the programs somehow to connect to the larger goal of community development?

**The highest stage that we are trying to achieve should be community change. We should be thinking about that when we are developing our programs and trying to find ways that they tie together.**

You look at larger trends to know how well you are doing this. If your goals are in the land-use area, you can actually look and see what is happening. Do we have more agriculture or less? Is the woodlot size continuing to go down over time? But we are early on in some of these things, so we can’t measure them that well yet. And I am not sure how to measure them in a completely objective way. I think that it is easy for us to find links that may not really be there. So I say we are probably sixty-five percent of the way there when, maybe, we are not even that. We do some retreats and try to get people to think more reflectively and to look critically at

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what we are doing. I think the board sees that as part of their role, and they do ask those kinds of questions. But I think we probably need to do more of that, and I think the way we are going in this new plan of work toward more broadly defined programs will allow for that kind of evaluation to take place. But it is not going to be easy because it's fuzzy. It is long-term change, and there are so many external forces at work that it is hard to know what is realistic. The evaluation piece is an overall weakness in Extension. We don't build it in. We have talked about this. Maybe the plan of work for the last year should be evaluation, and we actually stop programming. I can't imagine that actually happening, but we have talked about it.

Extension is an important part of the land-grant mission. The land-grant mission means things to me based on historical reading. The way I see it, the idea is democracy: education in a democratic way. We want to bring the concept of high-level education out to the masses. We want people to be involved in that end; we care about how communities work. That is the way that I see it. My interpretation of the language of the land-grant and the Morrill Act is that it was one of the greatest ideas that we have had in the country, that we really want democracy to extend to education. I don't think that we have realized it, but it is still a very lofty and worthy objective that I believe in. I don't know if we are any closer to actually achieving it than we were when it was first established as a goal.

I see the driving influence of most things in our culture being economics, defined in a very narrow way. I think Extension's mission now is to be part of helping society to change the way we look at measuring what is a healthy community, what is a healthy democracy. That is where I see us needing to go. I don't know if we are going to do it or not. I look at how hard it is for this organization to change just in New York State. I spent a lot of my time working on that, and it is draining. Locally, we are able to do it enough that it keeps me going and excited because we can actually do it. But on the larger scale, it seems daunting. It seems like a major corporation trying to change, and lots of times they don't make it. Whether Extension can do it or not, I don't know, but I see how it could be done. And I think that on a small scale, we have made big steps. We seem to have the potential to continue.

In our local community and region, I think the agroforestry concept is a way to pursue Extension's mission in a holistic way. How far we can go with that, and where is it going to lead, is my main interest. On the administrative side, we need to try to figure out ways to continue to alter the structure so that we are really applying our resources and not cheating our mission. We need to work in a way that is most efficient and most effective. I don't think we are doing that now. My biggest concern is that we won't be able to change fast enough to create the kind of mo-

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mentum we are going to need to get a new kind of approach before we run out of money. I get concerned that inertia or resistance will bring us down before we get there.

It feels like Extension has always been against the tide of the notion that the market is above everything. We are trying to teach people how to do deeper things. When I look at the planning departments and economic developers and even the Chamber of Commerce, they need education too, because it seems they still have a fairly shallow accounting. They are looking at bringing things in that carry jobs. They are not looking at the whole perspective. Natural resources are not considered in the economic equation. My feeling is that either we are going to figure out a way to change some of this, or, as some of the people I have been reading lately are arguing, there is going to be a crash at some point. Then what is going to be rebuilt is what we are talking about, more regional economies, smaller-scale energy systems, and local currencies and bartering. We're back to the 1930s. I just read Kirkpatrick Sale's bioregional vision book; I find that kind of thing appealing. I see a lot of truth in what they are talking about, and I think in Extension work, we are doing a lot of that. At least, that is what I feel like what I am doing.

I think the incentive to change has to be because you decide that this is where the real needs are in the communities. It can't be because this is going to save us or keep us funded. If we are making decisions based on that, I don't think that we are going to get there. The positive side is that I sense that things are changing in the larger community and that we are on the right track. And I think that things are changing at Cornell. People are reconsidering what we do as part of outreach. I feel a whole different mood in the leaders in the key positions. I think the interest is there.

I think because the way the world is going, we are going to look at more regional kinds of approaches to our communities and the economy. The kind of work that Extension can do fits that very well. I think the world is changing, and we can be a big help to some of the things that need to happen to redesign the way communities work and the way we interact with the landscape. Almost everyone agrees that what we have been doing is not sustainable for society, and Extension can be a huge contributor to changing that. That is the kind of work that we have always been doing, and we are still around. There are a lot of people who want to do it and who are really talented and have a lot of passion for it. So I think that Extension is still here, and we are ready to tackle this new mission.

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## Rick Burstell

*Program Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Greene County*

I am a Program Assistant with the Agriculture Department at Cooperative Extension. Recently, they have been calling me a Program Educator. I am not exactly sure what the difference is in the terminology. My actual job is program assistant. I have been in this position just over four years. I work for Greene County Cornell-Cooperative Extension (GC-CCE). Greene County is in the upper part of the Hudson Valley in the northern edge of the Catskill Mountains.

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Jean Griffiths**

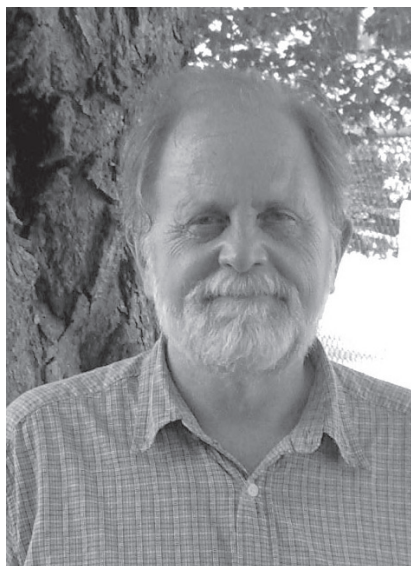
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County Cornell-Cooperative Extension (GC-CCE). Greene County is in the upper part of the Hudson Valley in the northern edge of the Catskill Mountains.

When I initially took the job, it pretty much revolved around providing a service to the local citizens in regard to gardening and wildlife issues. I would answer people's questions. That is what I was doing when I first got involved. Since that time, I have been involved with the Master Gardener program and a few other programs in the local area. I'm also doing some teaching in some of the local elementary schools. Now we are in the process of expanding our Lyme disease education program. I will be doing a lot of speaking around the county to different people about Lyme disease.

With this particular job, my responsibilities change often, but Extension's mission is to try to improve people's lives by helping them make informed decisions about different things. One example would be Lyme disease. Lyme disease and deer ticks are endemic in this county. I still find there is a lot of ignorance about how you



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acquire Lyme disease and what to do if you are bitten. You still hear horrible stories of people who are misdiagnosed. So my campaign this year is to make sure that every citizen in our county is aware of as much information as possible, as much as they can consume without overkill, about Lyme disease and deer tick issues.

My personal goals have changed over time. I have two children, and they were my main goal while I was raising them. They both have gone on to college and moved out of the house, so my main goals are different now. Now I am basically trying to deal with the local citizens, my neighbors and the people I come in contact with every day. I am trying to make Extension a life-affirming place. I'm also trying to get everybody on somewhat the same page about the things we need to do. I personally think we need to evolve if we are going to survive as a species. I just want to bring awareness to as many people as I can. I want people to think about the little things that they do and how that affects the whole world.

Most of my career life was with a totally different type of occupation. I worked as a diesel mechanic. I worked on big trucks, bulldozers, buses, and all types of vehicles. I never really found it that fulfilling. I didn't feel that I was providing that much of a service, except maybe to tune things up a bit and make them run more properly. I am actually able to do constructive things in the community with this job, and I find that very rewarding. I am passionate about quality of life and environmental issues. I am also passionate about democracy and self-governance. My passion is appreciating as much as we can of life while we know it.

How I got involved with Extension is an interesting story. My wife and my boss's wife worked together at a local nursery, and they became very good friends. I ended up being introduced to



### **I am trying to make Extension a life-affirming place.**

Bob Beyfuss [GC-CCE agriculture issue leader] through my wife. Bob and I became very good friends over the course of eight years or so. We saw each other on weekends and in the evenings. We didn't really have much in common in terms of employment, but we had a lot of other things in common. Later on, I ended up in a position where I wasn't physically able to maintain my other occupation. At that time, Bob had some openings on his staff, and he thought that I would be an ideal candidate. Regardless of the fact that I was a mechanic, he always thought that I was very intelligent. The perception many people have of people who work with their hands is that they do not necessarily think that much. But that is not always the case. I was a diesel mechanic for just over twenty years. When Bob explained what this part-time position was like, it sounded like something I would be interested in. I was very excited, but I didn't really think he was going to consider me as

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a candidate for the job. So I just kept poking my nose back into it, and eventually, he was really serious. He was willing to give me a shot at coming in here and trying something different. I had been toying with several other ideas in the private sector with some of my transferable mechanical skills, but it wasn't really what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something that was life-affirming and positive, something that would have some kind of effect.

I grew up on Long Island. I would have to call it metropolitan New York. When I first moved there, it was a farm area, but by the time I left there in the early 1970s, it was very congested. That is really why I left. It was a great place to grow up. I always thought that I got a lot of education just from being in the metropoli-

**I am passionate about quality of life and environmental issues. I am also passionate about democracy and self-governance.**

tan New York area. Plus, it was very close to the water. I grew up on the Long Island Sound and did a lot of fishing and boating and things like that. I always really enjoyed that.

I started college down in Farmingdale, but dropped out. The late sixties and early seventies were a confusing time for me. It was right in the middle of the Vietnam War. I was draft material, 1-A, and there was a lot of pressure there. I had a lot of friends who joined the Marines and went to Vietnam. I was involved in a lot of the protesting that went on at that time. My friends had come back and told me that it was absolutely not a good idea to go there. They started filling me in on what was going on. So as far as my first college experience went, it was not that nourishing to me.

I started college down in Farmingdale, but dropped out. The late sixties and early seventies were a

The reasons why I became a mechanic had more to do with the fact that I wanted to live out in a rural area. I wanted to be able to make a living somewhere away from the confusion of mankind, so to speak, far from the city. I had been living around the city for quite some time, and I found it to be not that fulfilling. I wanted to live out in the open spaces. When you live in the city or the suburb for most of your life, and go out to the open air, it is such a refreshing thing. You just don't want to leave. I find it can be the opposite with the local kids around here. They grow up in the open space; they don't mind going into the city. I guess it's a change of pace.

So I planned on moving off of Long Island. I thought that mankind was going in the wrong direction. It seemed to me, and it still seems to me, that mankind is trying to dominate and conquer our own environment. That didn't seem like a practical thing to me. I thought that a lot of people were missing the point. And I thought that if I got myself away from all of those things that I would be able to raise a family and do things in a healthier environment.

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I started college again in the mid-eighties, while I was a mechanic. I came up here and started going to a local community college, Columbia-Greene Community College. I really loved it. I was so surprised that I was an older student returning to college and my brain actually still worked. I could learn things. It was so refreshing. It felt like I could actually see my head expanding with all of the information that I was consuming at the time. I remember some of the professors would keep me after class and say that they really enjoyed talking with me, but that I needed to give some of the other folks time to talk once in a while: "You cannot dominate every class." My attitude at the time was: "I am paying for this, and I want to get as much at of it as I can." A lot of the students who were there were quite a bit younger and did not seem to have that need that I had. But when I got to about thirty-something credits, I found it was just too overwhelming being a diesel mechanic and a student at the same time. My kids were young, and my boss was not sympathetic of my education. I would stay up to about 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning writing papers, and I'd be dragging the next day. So that did not work out. I ended up leaving school again. However, while I was in school, I found out that so many of the students were there just to get a job like the one I had. This was disturbing to me. Apparently they thought that I had reached some level that they wanted to get to. I always felt that I had never actually reached that level. I was a returning student. It wasn't just about making money; it was about expanding my education.

My parents were a good influence on a lot of the things that I did. I also had a friend who was the same age as me who was brilliant. He was reading people like Buber and Russell when he was twelve or thirteen years old. He was a brilliant young man who influenced me quite a bit to look around the world and see things a little differently. And of course, I became a reader myself and was very influenced by lots of different types of things that I read. I read many different topic areas including science, politics, philosophy and eastern philosophy. Writers like Martin Buber, Alan Watts and Bertrand Russell influenced me.

My life path definitely evolved over a long period of time. I can remember, even from an early age, looking at the stars maybe a little more often than I should have. And I remember trying to figure out exactly what was going on. In the course of your life, you become more and more aware of things, and you are influenced more and more as you get more information. When I was seventeen or eighteen, I realized that I was alive, that I was a multi-cellular organism. I started putting all these things together and realizing what this all meant. It was much more than academic; it is something that goes right into your soul. I would have to call it like "born again," but it's not necessarily a religious experience.

The Extension project I want to talk about was focused on teaching fourth

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graders at the local elementary school some relevant information about their environment. I was going in one day a week for about eleven or twelve weeks. I taught them about how plants grow and how important it is for them to respect their environment. We talked about plants and about their relationship to the sun and the earth. We talked about the trees and the forests. We talked about things that they would do in their yard. We would talk about how they would actually have an effect down the road somewhere.

It was great to be around little kids again. My daughter is almost thirty, and my son is in his twenties. I missed having the little guys around. They are so fresh and open in their thinking, no big biases or prejudices. They are like a clean slate that hasn't been filled up with all the serial killings on TV and those other things that we all get exposed to on a general basis.

The original motivation for the project came because there was some grant money available through the Catskill Watershed Corporation, a Local Development Corporation that was established to protect the water resources of the New York City watershed West of the Hudson River. We thought, "Hey, there is actually some money here; maybe we can put together a pilot program at one of local elementary schools. Then, maybe, over time, we could enlarge it a little bit. Maybe we could do it in all the local school systems?" That was initially how things got started.

The nutrition people in our office already had a connection with some of the young people in our local school. They had a summer garden program going on there. That was when we saw the grant. We asked the nutrition person for the name of the principal, and we pursued it. The teachers and the principal were extremely receptive to having this educational program. They were all very eager to have us come in. So were the students. It seemed to me that the students liked the change in pace of having some different folks come in and teach them. We were in the classroom for most of the sessions until the last few weeks, when we were in the garden then.

The program started with myself and Bill McIntire, a 4-H guy who is no longer working here. We sat down and talked about the possibilities of doing the program. We talked about how he could help with some of the planning, and I could help with one of my Master Gardeners doing the teaching. The Master Gardener program is something that I am sure anybody that is connected with Cornell University must know about. The program was established to help the Cooperative Extension offices throughout the country get information out to citizens. Because we do not have large staffs and large bank accounts to do this work, we actually need help from some of the local citizens to get as much information as we can out

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to the public. We offer training to the Master Gardeners, then expect them to give us that certain amount of time back as volunteers.

So for the school program, I got two of my Master Gardeners who had some experience teaching children. Grace was a retired school teacher. The other woman has a lot of grandchildren and has been around children most of her life. She was very good with children. As it turned out, she ended up not being able to participate with the program, so I only had Grace. I ended up having to do a lot of the program myself, which was great for me. I enjoyed it even though it was during my busiest season, which did put an extra strain on me. I was working a little more in the evenings, trying to get my telephone work done, calling the people who call me with these different concerns in the spring and early summer.

I relied on Bill to order the books and things like that, but it ended up falling into my lap because I was the one who had the staff to do the teaching. I was the guy who kept the whole program going and designed what we were going to do. It would not have happened had I not put it together. That was my specific contribution. For one, I like people, especially children. So I think that was helpful. In these times, when things are as tense as they are, I think that spending more time out in the garden with plants and soil is good therapy. I think most people get an incredible amount of awareness of miraculous things by just spending a little amount of time with simple plants out in the garden. I think that those are life-affirming types of things.

Grace Bowne, the Master Gardener, and I sat down and wrote up the program. We went through lots of different references. We tried to put together a program that would work in the northern Catskills. We ended up getting one of the neighbors to donate a small piece of property near the school to put in a butterfly garden. We had the students start their own plants, and we put some of them in the garden. The kids even took some of the plants home. The nutrition person had her own agenda; I think she had four sessions with the students on nutrition. There was another Master Gardener that I got involved too. His name is Dick Johnson, and he is a beekeeper. I had him come and do a class on honeybees. He taught all of the interesting things that people don't generally know about honeybees, or honey itself. The kids were fascinated with that. That was one of our better classes.

When we started the class, the one elementary school teacher who had been teaching for eight years said, "This is the worst class that I have ever had in all eight years." I was a little nervous at first since I had really never taught kids before, except for my own. I was nervous that maybe kids today were like *The Lord of the Flies*, unruly or really difficult. But I came to find out that even the ones who were supposed to be the biggest troublemakers were great. I didn't have one problem

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with them. It was enjoyable. By the second week, they were like kids we had known for a long time. They seemed to be comfortable with us and us with them.

One of the fun days was the day we were taking photos because the kids really like to ham it up at that age. They were all over me. I actually had them climbing up my back at one point. We had a digital camera, and we were taking a lot of great shots out in the garden. They were all over the camera. We had the truck there and all the tools, the wheelbarrow, and the mulch, and the plants. It was a little chaotic. But it was very enjoyable, too. The kids were having a lot of fun; they were laughing and having a great time. There was not doubt in our minds they certainly learned something.

Grace was an elementary school teacher and used to being around young folks. She was an enormous help to me. She took care of all the plantings. She'd even

**We taught them that in order for them to grow their own vegetables and flowers, they didn't have to go out and poison everything all the time. There was a better way to do it.**

take stuff home. Some of the programs involved starting the plant seeds in the classroom. But we found that it wasn't working that well because the plants were on the windowsill above the heat radiator. So we ended up taking them home and nursing them until the weather got better and we could plant them outside in the garden. Grace helped with all the programs that we

wrote up for each day. She was just an enormously gifted and sweet person.

During the program, we talked about a lot of things. We were doing this program in cooperation with the Catskill Watershed Corporation. The main gist of our message was that young people will become the people who will live here in the future. They should have some consciousness of what they do in their yard will end up in the watershed. It does not really matter where you live. You are always in somebody's watershed somewhere no matter what you do. You may think that it's not that relevant to go out and do this or do that in your yard but ultimately it does end up as everybody's problem. So if you are conscientious of how you do things at home, you will have a positive effect on the world at large. The main point we tried to tell them was that there were a lot of things that they could do to make sure that they would keep their place safe, clean and pure. We taught them that in order for them to grow their own vegetables and flowers, they didn't have to go out and poison everything all the time. There was a better way to do it.

Money to do the program was a concern from the get go. We didn't have our own money here at Extension to fund anything. I suppose we could have gone out

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and solicited some donations from people, but it didn't get to that point. The initial turning point was when we got the grant from the Catskill watershed. We used that money to purchase some supplies—seeds, soil, and different things like that. We could then contribute the time and labor into the program.

It fell together really well. We started with the nutrition person who talked about the importance of food and vegetables, local food products, and even organic food. We evolved into growing the fruits and the vegetables and our beekeeper talking about the bees pollinating the fruits and the vegetables. They all were able to do a little composting and planting themselves—starting seeds and planting the things out in the garden. They also took plants home and planted them at home. It started from being not a totally organized plan, but everything essentially fell into place. It really turned into a nice little program.

The support of the school system and the principal was great. It turned out that a neighbor's donated garden plot was actually closer than the one the school offered. The neighbor had heard through the grapevine that we were doing this program. They were willing to give the children the garden for this use. We were surprised that the school was so eager to embrace the program. I know that part of the curriculum for that year had touched on all the things that we were touching on. In a way, a lot of the information that we were giving them was perhaps a little bit of a repetition, although we covered it in a different way and with more detail. At first, I wasn't sure if the teachers would embrace the ideas since it was stuff that they had already done. But they seemed to appreciate it a lot; their attitude was: "Repeating information would be a good idea for these kids; maybe some of it would sink in."

Both of my Master Gardeners were important to the program. Dick Johnson is a retired man from New Jersey. I think he was a chemist; now he is a beekeeper. He is just a wealth of information about any number of things, especially honeybees. He was a colorful character. People like Grace are a positive force on the planet. She always has a bright life-affirming way of looking at everything. I learned a lot from Grace. I think that has to do with her gentle style. She is such a soft-spoken and kind person. It was refreshing to watch her deal with the students. One of the teachers in the class was pretty tough; she was yelling and screaming. I would watch Grace take over, and the class would just mellow right out. It was an amazing thing. She was like their grandmother.

Grace went above and beyond the call of duty as a Master Gardener volunteer. She put in many more hours than she needed to. As a matter of fact, she is going to do more programs for us again this year because she wants to do something positive in her life. Volunteering for us is a great way for her to do that, and it is

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great for us also. She is giving something back, and I think that is the way that she looks at it. Her value system embraces ideals like that. Relationships with each other in the community are more important than having a huge amount of money and buying a huge house and big cars.

We also had discussions about all the other stimulants that kids get at this age today. In between the television and the movies, we get taken in by all these horrible images and versions of reality. Most of our realities are made up of all these phony Hollywood situations. We have so much of that in our consciousness. We need to have some other good information in there too; that people cooperate with each other and do good things. Where people are more concerned about helping their community than they are about building their bank account.

**Most of our realities are made up of all these phony Hollywood situations ... We need to have some other good information in there too; that people cooperate with each other and do good things. Where people are more concerned about helping their community than they are about building their bank account.**

We didn't really encounter any obstacles. We had a couple little issues with the maintenance department at the school. They offered to till the garden for us, but it never got done, which really wasn't an issue; we did it ourselves. They ended up having some equipment problems. No one was trying to give us a hard time. There really were no conflicts during the whole program.

The worst thing for me was that it was quite a distance away. It took place one day per week, and I am only a part-time person. At that time of year, probably in the course of April to July, I am dealing with 1,700 phone calls

that I get for people bringing in samples for identification, insects for identification, and all these different things that were going on in my life at the time. It made it challenging. I had to leave the office by 8:30 in the morning, and I wouldn't get back until 2-2:30 in the afternoon. By the time I would get back, I would have a million messages on my desk. But I got through it. I took a lot of the work home. I had to buy my wife flowers a little more often. I had to explain to her that this tough union mechanic was now working on his own time doing this stuff, which was something she just did not understand.

I enjoyed working with the youth. I also enjoy the phone calls. I like working with the public and with all the different types of concerns and complaints. To be

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honest, I think having both kinds of work makes me much more appreciative. It's like having summer and winter. If I just did the one all the time, I would probably miss the other. Sometimes it seems like we refer people to a lot of other places. If people don't know where to call, oftentimes they call us with a lot of different types of questions. We get calls if they have lead in their water. We get concerns with all different kinds of things.

At this point, we are not continuing this particular program. There are a lot of reasons for not continuing, and some of them are financial. I haven't actually spoken to the watershed people about the possibility of getting more money and continuing the programs. Initially, we wanted to go into two schools that are in the area, and we are still talking about it. We haven't given it up yet. We are also working on a few other issues right now. I need to expand our Master Gardener program and get some new volunteers, which is something we are working on now. We have about twenty-five volunteers, but out of that twenty-five, we only have about eight or ten who are active. Maybe ten of the other ones are active once in a while, but nothing on a consistent basis. So we need to get some more volunteers. I am sure that there are some people out there who are looking for something to do. That is one thing about the Master Gardener program. They are not only performing a service for us, but also, in a way, we perform a service for them. We give them something useful to do. We give them a way to participate with their community and improve their community. It is a win-win situation.

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I would do some things differently. I probably didn't do as great an evaluation as I could have. I could have had more on paper about the evaluation. We told them quite a bit on the first day of class, and we did the same thing on the last day of class. They pretty much got it, but whether they retained that I don't know. I assume that they did. We tried to explain different things about their relationship to the forest and how, basically, those critters out there in the forest have been there for a long time, and they had to be respectful of them. We told them that it was not just all put there for their disposal. It wasn't just their playground. We explained that this is their home, and you have to have respect. They understood that; at least they said that they did. We would have to see how that works over time.

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Like everything else in life, more planning in the beginning probably would have been better to get an understanding of the information that we were trying to get to these ten-year-old kids. I had books and books stacked up in my office for several weeks. I went through all different kinds of programming for children. I probably should have gone more with my instinct and experiences with my own kids in the garden instead of looking at so many different materials. I drowned myself in so much material that I found it difficult to decide what I wanted to teach. I worked that out. By the time we got done, we pretty much figured it out. We got it down to the science. As we got further and further into the process, we understood how much they would learn in a fifty-minute period. We learned how much we could actually give them. When we started out with the program, we were going to teach a certain amount in one day, but we would only get halfway through it. By the time we got about four days in, we were able to figure out how much we could get them to absorb in about fifty minutes of time. I don't know if that was anything we could have done before; it was something that we had to learn. I wasn't exactly sure how quick these kids would absorb the information or how attentive they would be.

I wanted to make the program as hands-on as I could. They had their hands in the compost, their hands in the soil, their hands in the seeds, so that they were participating. I always felt in the mechanics business that people never learned by watching somebody do something. They had to do it themselves in order to learn. I was very big on that; they had to have their hands on things. They had to seem like they were experiencing it themselves. This is something that I learned from experience. I was beginning to look at a lot of different projects that people had done in various places in the country with kids of this age. Some of them were pretty ambitious programs with a lot of information to be giving a ten-year-old. For me, I had to go back to the way it was with my own kids. They will take a certain amount of information and they will appreciate it, and then maybe you can repeat it once or twice. But you get to a certain point where they just tune it out. I had to be aware of when that would be so I could move on to the next subject. I would make it something that was hands-on and interesting, something that they could actually look at or touch. It had to be something that wasn't just me lecturing them. My kids have always told me, "Don't lecture me, Dad! Inform me, but don't lecture me."

This concept certainly works with adults as well. I have the same relationship with a lot of people; it is a relative thing. Some people can absorb a lot more than other people can, and you have to tone your presentation down to whatever your audience is. I get senior citizens in here who I find quite similar to the young people.

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They really don't want to get too much into the complexities of the issue. They just want to know what to do. You need to tone your presentation to the audience. You have to give them what they want and what they are comfortable with. If you start to get too technical, often times it just turns them off.

There is a role for the expert when we are dealing with people who are in tune with what they are doing. If we are dealing with somebody who is a farmer or making a living, that is a whole different scenario. They want to know the "meat and potatoes" of the whole issue. When we are dealing with a homeowner who has a concern about his rose or some tree in his yard, it is a whole different kind of relationship. They may not want to know all the science involved in it, and often times, you need to try to influence them in that direction. They may need to get to a little better understanding. If they live in an area where the soil is a low pH of 5, maybe they shouldn't be planting that particular variety. It all depends on the audience. I do get challenged quite a bit by some of the serious gardeners who really want to know what my expertise is. And often, they may have much more experience in that particular area than I do. But I am willing to learn; I am a fast learner. I also have a general idea of a lot of things so that helps. I learn something everyday. It goes both ways. That is what this job is to me: a learning experience. I am constantly consuming information. As a matter of fact, it is almost like information overload. I am reading four books at home. I have so much coming in to my brain; it is amazing that I don't just melt down.

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If there is anything that I regret at all about the program, it is that it is not an ongoing program at this point. I almost feel like I have neglected the kids. They are fifth graders now, and I feel like I need to go back and talk with them. I was there in September dealing with the garden, but I didn't deal with any of the kids. I felt like we should have an ongoing program there all the time. So that is my only regret. I hope that we get to the point that we will do that again.

I think that the other people who worked on this project learned to understand my passions. I was a little pushy about getting it going. I felt that if I didn't hammer away, it wouldn't have happened, and it was something that I wanted to do. I look back at times, and I wonder to myself if I was a little too forceful. It is a "type A" kind of a trait. We only have a certain amount of time to get things done. But ultimately, I have become a very good friend with Grace, so I guess she wasn't offended in any way. I feel bad for Bill because he no longer works here. He is left

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out of the entire loop now. But we all move on. It was a project that I put together and more or less got rolling. It wouldn't have happened if I had not done that. I initially looked at it as a pilot program. I wanted to test the waters and not just see how willing the kids would be, but how I would be, whether it was something that I wanted. I haven't been around young kids for a long time.

Those particular fifty kids in the fourth grade got some additional information from people who are outside of their normal experience. I am sure they all felt that we were passionate about what we were trying to teach them. I am sure that we did have an impact on those kids. What I need to do now is to present and plan this on a larger basis. I need to expand my volunteer base in order to do that. I have different agendas going on with the Master Gardeners. I am the Master Gardener coordinator. I want to get the program big enough to have some of the Master Gardeners taking some of that responsibility. Maybe we could break off into different groups in different directions. Since Grace is so knowledgeable about how we did the school program, she could help with some new folks to get a project like that going again. We have several other things that we are doing besides that program. Hopefully I will be able to empower these people to be more in control rather than having me lead everybody all the time.

I am a cheerleader, and I think that everybody in the office would tell you that. I am also the prophet of doom. It is kind of a dual role. This gets back to my

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personal philosophy of life. These are precious moments that we all have, and they are unique in time and space and God; these moments are what we make of them. That is pretty much it. No matter how bright it is, or how dark it is, it is what you make of it. I am forever pushing people to that kind of

understanding. We have nobody but ourselves to blame or praise. People take me different ways at different times. People say that I am too optimistic, and I have had people tell me I am too pessimistic. I have always thought that people are inherently good, but they can be led to do horrible things. I think that they can be generally good given the opportunity. I have always been an optimist in that way. So it is a paradox, which I think that most things in life are. I think I am also a therapist a lot of times because you get a lot of people who need to talk. I get a lot of senior women who call here. Their husbands have been dead for five or ten years, maybe longer. They are lonely and have all kinds of gardening things that they want to talk about for hours. I have actually been coaxed over to their house to help

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trap the mice or whatever the particular problem is. It really has to do with the fact that they don't have anybody.

We just had our big staff meeting the other day. It was all about our Extension mission and all the things that Cornell Cooperative Extension is going to be involved in here in Greene County. It was so impressive to me; it was all positive. When I was involved with private industry, we always had a graph on the wall with the numbers, and that was what it was all about. The only thing that mattered was the numbers. If the numbers were going up, everything was fine. It didn't matter if everybody in the place was suffering or not; it was all about the numbers. Here we want to improve this community. We want to make the people in this community more informed. We want to help them to make the right decisions in their life. We want to teach them to have a healthier attitude, to eat healthier, to be healthier towards their neighbors, and to embrace and protect the beautiful natural environment that they have around them.

I try to hook people up with other people because there are so many needs out there. There are so many things that could be done. In this county alone, 21 percent of our kids live below the poverty line. To me, being in the richest country in the world, that is just unacceptable. I just can't find any reason why those kids should be that way. I suppose we could blame it on their parents or something like that. But I don't think that the kids should be suffering for that. That is just my personal feeling. I think that we could do a lot better.

**When I was involved with private industry, we always had a graph on the wall with the numbers, and that was what it was all about.**

What kinds of skills do I need for this job? You pick up skills in the course of your life and a lot of them are transferable, things you can take with you from place to place. In my career, I was always involved in the management of the union. I was used to dealing with groups of people and with people with different needs and interests. The difference between management and the labor force is pretty substantial, and I always thought that I was able to understand both sides. I think I have good people skills, which are important.

I look at it from an engineers' perspective. How relevant is that? We have had discussions like that around here. How relevant is anything? Life on the planet; is it relevant at all? We have these big philosophical-type discussions, and we always come to the same conclusions. That yes, we are looking at several million years of evolution and an amazing amount of circumstances that had to happen just the

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right way for today to exist the way it does. There is so much accomplishment. Even in this country, the populous struggles to make it what it is today. There were certainly incredible things that happened, and it is important to be thankful for them in order for all of this to happen. So it's not enough to just slough it all off and say it's not that relevant. It is relevant. It is millions and millions of years of work to get to where we are today. I don't see that as being in vain; I think we need to be doing something positive with it.

I am an analytical kind of guy; when I look at anything, I basically trace it back to its origin. That probably helps to some degree, especially when you are dealing with science. What other skills do I have? Communications skills, that is what I consider part of my people skills. That gets back to my general philosophy. It is hard to say things like this, but it started at a very young age. I can remember at fourteen, debating people about Christianity and issues like that. I can remember people always saying things like, "Who are you?" I was the talkative one in the family. I certainly got some of these skills from my family and from reading. I still do a lot of reading. Lately I have been concentrating on foreign affairs, political issues and American history. I'm trying to just get with the program of what is going on. And I'm getting kind of scared. It is not looking good out there around the planet right now. When 70 percent of the world's population is looking at us right now going, "Who are you guys?" It kind of scares me.

As far as community education, we don't often consider that there is a lot of collective education that goes on outside of the institutions of education. I have dialogues with people from all over the place and I find that I have common ground with them. It is always amazing to me; they come from totally different environments than me, but we can hit on the same idea. I come from metropolitan, strip-mall Long Island, which is basically an economics based on growth.

Greene County is a beautiful place. Right now we are in a transition. We have some serious changes going on in this area that are a result of 9/11. For instance, the real estate has gone crazy. There has been a rise in building development. Wal-Mart wants to move in, and Home Depot is moving in. All of this will have, in my view, a negative effect on the community. When we think of community education here, what I am talking about now is not necessarily what I am teaching people when they are calling here. This is stuff that I think is relative to our community. We are in a transition. How we all deal with it in the next five or ten years may have a permanent effect on this area. This is a beautiful area to live in. It has a terrible economy. The major concern here is the economy. If we develop our area to build the economy, let's make sure that we maintain the integrity of the environment at the same time, so that it doesn't become like where I came from, where it is so

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polluted. Out on Long Island, there are a lot of educational programs about pesticide uses. They polluted everything down there. There are a million and a half people who live on the eastern tip of Long Island who have been throwing things in their yard and their cesspools for the last seventy-five years. Then they wonder why all the ground water is polluted down there. In Greene County, it is a critical time now for people to understand that the things we do in the next couple of years will have a major impact on this place. If we are going to maintain it as one of the special places, we are going to have to take some steps to do that.

I get what community education really is from this office. I have always appreciated it, and I am one of those people who is similar to a lot of the citizens out there. I don't always believe what people tell me, regardless of whether it is the government or an institution of higher learning. I am a little skeptical of the information that is out there. I want to see some proof when people make general kinds of statements. I noticed that my clients here are the same way. I even have had people flat out say, "No, I do not believe that. That is not the case at all." As an example, someone will call up with a rodent problem and say, "I went out and bought one of those electronic rodent machines, and it chased every rodent away on my property." I will say to them, "I've got the research here that says that that's not the case." And they will not deny that it worked for them. They give me a little testimony regardless of what Cornell tells them. "This works." I remind them that it may seem it works, but that may not be the case. There may be another reason why they are not seeing any rodents right now.

If I were going to be involved in more community education in this area, I would be trying to promote democracy a little bit more. I would try to get everybody out to vote. Maybe get everybody to sit at the town board meetings and get them a little more involved in what goes on in their community. It is difficult. I know that when I was working my other job, I was basically working 24-7. I didn't have time to get much community education. I was working until I was exhausted. I was coming home and going to sleep and going and doing it again. There are people out in the community who are so busy that they don't have time to read the paper or listen to the radio, even the local station. Basically, they miss us here at Extension. I have been trying to figure out ways to get to those folks, to find some kind of a hook. Something like, "If you

**In Greene County, it is a critical time now for people to understand that the things we do in the next couple of years will have a major impact on this place.**

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come to this class, we'll teach you how you can save \$200, and it will cost you \$5 to find out." That is the kind of hook that we need to get them to find the time. I think that once people get together—especially older people, because people are so isolated today—they find out that there are other people out there who are interested. They find out that others are trying to learn and trying to do better. I think it has a multiplying effect.

My general attitude toward humanity gives me a sense of hope. I think that people are not inherently evil, although, I often wonder about it. I never really believed in the concepts of good and evil anyway. I have always believed that was a human invention. I don't see much good and evil in the animal kingdom. It is either rational or irrational. So I am hopeful that, in time, we will see the errors in many of our ways. I was brought up Catholic, and we were taught that all of this stuff was put here for us to use. That was part of the education. There was some other parts that said that you shouldn't, but pretty much it was, "This was all put here for man." I have come to realize that man is not the big equation here. Man is just one of the many equations. It is all tied together. It is all connected, and one thing does come back and affect other things. I think that there is hope that humans will be more compassionate about all living things. Not just each other, but all the things that are out there. You can look at all the indigenous people all across the planet and listen to how they respected their environment. They respected even their enemies, and they respected all the other critters. They didn't have anywhere near the scientific information that we have to understand the complexities of all of these things. Yet they were able to have that kind of respect. I am hopeful that everyone will. I seriously think that time may be running out for that kind of thing to happen. It would seem to me that we haven't learned all that much. Even if we have all of this incredible technology now, we seem to be just as primitive as we were in the Roman Empire or any other empires. It pretty much seems that "empiring" is the same thing no matter when it takes place. It is all about possession and control. I think that we need to learn to live cooperatively with each other and learn not to destroy this place. Maybe we could all have some type of mutual respect with all the other living things out there.

This year I have several different projects going on in my work. Right now, I have a couple of programs for kids on spring break and a few more young people programs that I am trying to do. I am doing Lyme disease programs because we have a serious Lyme disease problem here. It is out of control. I have probably taken about forty ticks off of me in the past year. I take someone around my property, and we each pick off about five ticks. We also are doing a garden tour this year. I haven't done one in three years. We have done two before, and I did them pretty much by

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myself the first two years I was here. As much as I enjoyed it, it was a lot of work. This time I know exactly what I want to do. I know the places and locations to do it. I pretty much have it down to a science, so I am going to do another garden tour. People really enjoy the garden tours and I am actually going to generate some income. It is a double goal.

In my career I am looking forward to the planning process for this garden. We have a huge garden just outside of our building here. Our building is inside of a big park. We have this fairly large garden area that over the last few years has been used for different things. When Bob, my boss, had it about ten or fifteen years ago, he used to just grow corn and pass it out to everybody in the building. Somebody on staff about five years ago planted all different type of herbs, so it became an herb garden at that point. Unfortunately, a lot of those herbs were invasive, so they have pretty much taken over. The last couple of years, we maintained it the way that it was with the herbs. Then we put some ginseng beds out there because Bob is a ginseng person. Last year, some of the 4-H kids planted flowers and then sold them as cut flowers. This year I want to plow out the whole thing to plant food. I want to donate the food to the local food bank. I want to get the community involved, not just my volunteers. Like I said, about 21 percent of our young people are living under the poverty line. The people who are working here are not doing that terrifically. I want to help the food situation with our huge garden. I have spoken with a few people in the community who told me that they would be willing to come over and put some time into it. I see some kind of a little community garden to donate to the local food bank. And maybe I could get the community to actually help do it.

# profile

## Bob Beyfuss

*Agriculture and Natural Resources Issue Leader  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Greene County*

**M**y current title is Agriculture and Natural Resources Issue Leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County. I

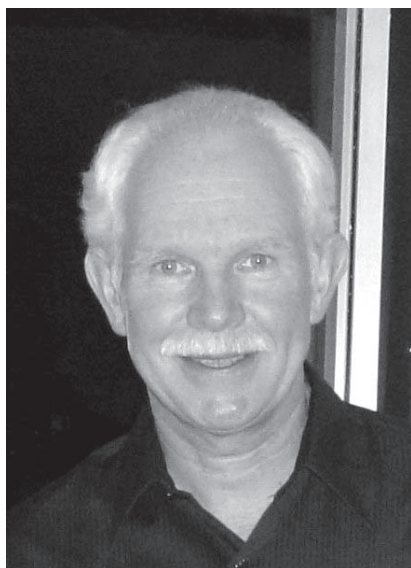
### INTERVIEWED BY

**Larry Van De Valk**

**October, 2003**

I also serve as the American ginseng specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension. I've been with Cooperative Extension twenty-seven years next March. I've been the Agriculture Program Leader for about sixteen years.

I have a rather varied resume. I spent most of my summers in Greene County. When I was a kid, my uncle had a dairy farm. I spent my summers working on that dairy farm until I was about 16 years old. At about that time I decided that I didn't particularly like cows all that much—that's blasphemy working for Cornell—so I started spending my summers working on a local horse farm not far from here. I knew from the time I was four years old that I would eventually live in Greene County. While living in New Jersey, during the winter, I attended Rutgers University, where I graduated in 1973 with a Bachelor's degree in botany. I immediately moved to Greene County and became a blacksmith. I had some experience shoeing horses while working on the horse farm. I did odd jobs, worked in gas stations, and cleaned toilets in a factory in Schenectady. I had many various and sundry odd jobs during the '70s. There was a profound depression, well, not a depression, but a recession going on in the '70s. I had been laid off from the plastic factory that I was



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working at, and I was actually collecting unemployment.

I had never heard of Cooperative Extension, despite Rutgers University being the land grant college for New Jersey. In 1977, the employment service said that they had an opening for a part-time horticulture assistant at Cooperative Extension in Cairo. Well, I applied for the job. As it turns out, the person who is chairman of the agriculture program committee at that time was the farmer that had purchased my Uncle John's dairy farm. That farmer's name was Charley Kohrs. He was a kind and a wonderful man. He helped my Uncle John out a great deal. He said, "Oh, I know this fellow; he's a good kid. Let's hire him." I wasn't a kid. I was 27 at the time. So I was hired as a part-time, temporary summer assistant. After working here two or three weeks, I decided that this was a career I really wanted to pursue, so I tried very hard to make myself indispensable. I learned how to do my boss's job—a classic thing. Anything that he hated to do, I would do voluntarily. That's how you make yourself indispensable. By 1978, our local board of directors decided that they would create an agent position for me, and I was hired officially as a Cooperative Extension agent in January 1979. Fortunately, I had the bachelor's degree, which was all that was required in those days. I had reasonably good grades, and I had some experience. So that is how I got to CCE. I've tried very hard to make the most of it.

The nicest thing about my job is that it is so diverse. I do have regular weekly duties. I've been writing a newspaper gardening column, which appears in nine or ten newspapers. I've been writing that column for over twenty years. I've also been doing regular radio programming that appears on four radio stations, three of which are taped. One of them I do live every Thursday morning on WGY, which is a big, 50,000-watt station. It's a live, call-in show. I also am the editor of the newsletter that we send out—a monthly newsletter that Greene County CCE sends out. In the past, I had hosted a TV show in Albany that essentially consisted of interviewing farmers. A CCE media specialist named Barbara Meffert produced the show. Those are pretty much the routine things. These are the things that have to be done each week that require me to spend some time in the office. I also am a resource person on topics related to home grounds maintenance and gardening. I have a part-time assistant that helps answer most of the gardening calls, but I still spend a good amount of time answering peoples' gardening questions. I have fairly extensive coursework in tree pathology. I'm an internationally certified arborist. And consequently, I tend to get an awful lot of calls that pertain to hazard trees. I evaluate trees on a community wide basis for local towns and municipalities to see if they are hazard trees. I am often involved in issues regarding tree planting and disease diagnosis due to the fact that I'm a certified arborist.

My other regular duties involve research. I have quite a bit of ongoing re-

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search and demonstration projects, particularly with American ginseng, and to a lesser extent with mushrooms, goldenseal, and ornamental plants. Primarily my research focus tends to be on ginseng, and the very practical side of learning the best ways that potential growers can grow it. I'm trying to come up with tools that will enable the average person to learn how to grow ginseng. I've got R&D sites where we bring in people and show them what ginseng looks like. We talk about the soil, and basically anything involved with that. I'm very fortunate. This is somewhat unique in the Extension system, to have a Cornell intern who works at the Arnot Forest. For the last four years I've been supervising an intern along with my partner, Louise Buck. We work on agroforestry projects—primarily ginseng, but also mushrooms and goldenseal. So in the summertime, I spend a good deal of time commuting back and forth between here and Arnot to work with that intern. I also do a lot of public speaking. I speak to garden clubs, to rotary groups, and I speak to Kiwanis. I'm usually speaking about topics related to gardening and horticulture.

I guess the other big hat that I wear is in the field of public health. Greene County does not really have a health department. We have a public health nursing department with one doctor, that's it. So we have very severe needs in the field of public health. Greene County is one of the leading counties in the state in terms of Lyme disease. If we had a health department we might be the leading county, but a lot of our cases are diagnosed outside of the county and consequently, they don't get recorded here. Last year, right across the river, Columbia County was the leading county in the US in terms of Lyme disease. So we do a lot of public education on the topic of "don't get bit by a tick." I coordinate school programs and environmental education programs regarding Lyme disease prevention. We have a tick ID service, and we educate people one-on-one, including most of the local doctors. If a patient shows up with a deer tick, or any tick on them, they usually send that person to us to educate them about the ecology of Lyme disease and deer ticks. I also work on public health issues like West Nile Virus and rabies. Those are the three public health issues that I get involved in. I spend a good deal of time doing public speaking on those particular topics too.

I supervise an extraordinarily talented, but extremely independent staff of three people. I have a full time agriculture agent whose specialty is livestock—Mick Bessire. Mick also works with field crops, and we also subcontract him to Columbia County to do some of their field crops work. But Mick's specialty is primarily in livestock. Marilyn Wyman is another educator that I supervise. She is a part-time person, and she works on community issues. Marilyn has really taken the lead on a lot of these big projects. Marilyn works on specific topics that are related to public policy and things like that. My third staff person is my horticulture assistant. His name is Rick

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Burstell. He pretty much coordinates the Master Gardener program, although I do a lot of teaching for that. He coordinates the day-to-day Master Gardener program schedules, the volunteers, and he answers most of the phone calls that come in regarding horticulture. He also does a lot of the public health work in terms of answering questions, identifying ticks, and working with people.

What I enjoy the most about my job, particularly over the last five to eight years, has been working quite closely with students—particularly interns. Not so much in the classroom, but in one-on-one situations. In addition to the Cornell interns at the Arnot forest, I've had a couple of interns right here in Greene County. I think that of all the things I do on my job, I like working with interns one-on-one, that type of education. I've had some great interns. I make them work fifteen-hour days, occasionally. We'll take off from Greene County and we'll go up to Lake Placid to look at some plots, hit a few other spots, and get them back home at midnight. I really like that intensive one-on-one kind of education. That's what turns me on the most about the job.

My personal goals pretty much revolve around two things. One is making a difference in young people's lives, and that ties directly back into working with the interns. I would like some of these young people that I've worked with over the years to be able to say, "That guy made a big difference in my life." I've had some very talented interns that may go on to do great things, really great things. I would love to have some former student win a Nobel prize, be in Stockholm and say, "You know, there was this old guy in Greene County that really pushed me in that direction..." That would be the dream thing that I would like.

**My personal goals pretty much revolve around two things. One is making a difference in young people's lives.**

My second goal relates more to the fact that I feel as though I am helping to create an industry that will have a positive effect on the lives of rural residents in upstate New York. It's interesting that at the turn of the 20th century there were over 5000 ginseng farms in New York. Now they have kind of petered out in upstate New York. I would like to be responsible for at least stimulating that industry to make a comeback. I'm also very concerned about this particular plant—American ginseng, which is sort of a threatened, or at least a commercially exploitable plant. I would like to be able to say that due to my work, my efforts, we understand more about the ecology of the plant than we did before. And as a result of some of my

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work, we've taken strides to reintroduce this plant to its native habitat in New York. I would like people to say that about me when I'm gone.

In 1984, I was granted sabbatical from Extension in Greene County to pursue a Master's degree. I attended Cornell. I was very fortunate that my local association agreed to pay my entire salary for the entire year while I was a student at Cornell. Cornell waived tuition and fees, and I was able to get a couple of scholarships on

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top of my salary. So I was a wealthy graduate student. I rented a room from my counterpart in Tompkins County, two blocks from the Cornell campus. I lived well there for a year and had a wonderful, wonderful time academically, emotionally and physically.

Within six months, I had decided that I wanted to write my Master's project on American ginseng. The reason for that was because I credited con-

suming American ginseng with the success that I met with in graduate school. When I left here to go back to school in 1984, I was petrified. I had been on the job for about seven years. I was in a marriage that really was kind of falling apart at the time, and I had gotten about forty pounds overweight. I was very nervous about going back to school, especially with the Cornell reputation—all the smart kids out there. I was under a great deal of stress. When I first returned from my first weekend home from school, my wife said she wanted a divorce. She wanted it immediately—to add to the stress load. Well I had heard a bit about ginseng from some people that I had on my TV show in the Albany area, and I learned a good deal about ginseng from interviewing farmers. Not just how to grow it, but how it's used; it was reported to be the best thing in the world for stress. So when I returned to graduate school in 1984, and found myself confronted with all these stresses, I started taking wild American ginseng. I think it had a profound effect on my own personal health. I suddenly found that I could work from 7:00 in the morning until 1:00 AM. I went to the gym every night, lost all the weight I needed to lose, got all "A's" in my grades, did well academically; and I credited the ginseng with it.

So when it came time to prepare my Master's project, I asked my major professor, George Good, if I could write my project on American ginseng. Being the wonderful person that George is, he agreed. So I started the paper search, the research in the stacks. I found that there was virtually no information out there, which was actually good. It made anything that I was going to come up with hard to

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refute, but on the other hand, it was easy to learn a lot very quickly. So I spent my second semester in the library doing my research and the paper chase. Then I took a summer and actually visited ginseng growers and got some practical experience. I spent some time in Wisconsin, where most of the ginseng in this country is grown. Spent some time in Canada, and visited some of the ginseng people in North Carolina. I rounded out my master's project, which took about a year and a half to finish, write and get published. I officially got my Master's degree in the Department of Horticulture in January 1987, but the Master's was in Agriculture.

It was funny, because when I returned to Greene County, I had learned about ginseng, and my goal was to develop this ginseng growing industry. At that time ginseng was grown under artificial shade cloth in a field situation. I really did not realize at the time how intensive that system was and how dependent it was upon synthetic inputs, particularly pesticides. Since ginseng is a very minor use crop, there are very few pesticides registered for it. Before I knew it, within three or four months after returning from school, I found myself working with a group of investors who spent over a million dollars trying to grow ginseng on a farm in the Catskills. I was very involved in that commercial nine-acre ginseng operation. It failed horribly. It failed for a number of reasons—bad management, no pesticides to use, and a host of other factors that went wrong; which got me disgusted with the way it was produced in the mass quantities.

It turned out to be fortuitous because no sooner had I thrown my hands up in the air and said, "This is not the way it's going to work," the price of cultivated ginseng just went in the toilet. That's because literally thousands and thousands of acres that were being properly managed were springing up in Canada. In 1984, there weren't more than 200 or 300 acres of ginseng in Canada. By 1990, there were close to 5000 acres in production. So the market, the supply, was just huge. So I got away from the field-cultivated ginseng just as the prices were falling apart. That was a good thing, but I never lost my interest in ginseng. I was still fascinated with the plant and its ecology, particularly the woodland version.

I kept watching the ginseng prices. As the price for the field-cultivated ginseng was going down, the price for the wild ginseng, or the wood's cultivated ginseng, was going up and up and up. I remember in the '70s, it was like \$100 per pound. In the '80s, woods grown ginseng was around \$185 per pound. Well by the late '80s, it was getting \$300–\$400 per pound. It was like, "Wow, you could grow this stuff in the woods; you could make some dough here!" Then, when Louise Buck contacted me probably seven or eight years ago, she was working in agroforestry and said ginseng might be a component of an agroforestry system. You know, that rekindled my interest in working with it. Louise has been my primary benefactor

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ever since. Without Louise, I don't think I would be on this path; she has been the most important person in me being where I am today.

I'm going to tell you about the story of how we organized the ARC. The ARC is a resource center, the Agroforestry Resource Center. You wouldn't believe how we struggled with the name. The Sustainable Landscape Learning Center was one that we kicked around a lot. There have been a lot of names, but we finally settled on the ARC. I think because that encompasses all we are trying to do here. What we envisioned was not just a place where students can come and learn about topics that are related to agroforestry, but also a place that would serve as a resource for people that are interested in rural land management and some of the issues that are involved in rural landscape development. Our original focus was on three things. One of things was the classroom where we could actually teach. The second thing was the resource center where people from all over the country, indeed all over the world, could come and learn on the accumulated body of agroforestry and rural

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land use planning issues. The third focus was to be able to offer what we had to the rest of the world through distance learning. The one impetus to get this thing off the ground was the fact that we received a \$35,000 grant to acquire distance learning equipment.

I guess my first thought about doing something like this happened before any of those grants actually happened. In September 2000, we hosted an international ginseng conference right here in Greene County. This was kind of a culmination of the time I had spent working on ginseng. Meeting many people over the years in the ginseng industry, being a very small group of people, I was able to attract some really high-powered people to that conference. I was also able to get some political support. Our local Assemblyman at that time was a gentleman by the name of John Faso. John really had, and still does have, a great deal of foresight. He was at the ginseng conference giving the introductory remarks since he came up with a \$10,000 member item to support the conference. We used this money to provide scholarships for farmers because it was a very expensive conference. It cost \$300 to go to it. We took John's money and we gave scholarships to farmers who were interested in growing ginseng.

I remember that at the end of the conference, John Faso said to me, "Well

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Bob, this was all very nice, and it was a very successful conference; you got a lot of excitement and enthusiasm. Where are you going to take it from here?" And I said to John, talking off the top of my head, "Well, we really need to have some sort of a facility that is actually devoted to this type of research, and not just regarding ginseng, but other things that are happening out in the woods. 85% of this county is forestland. That's what we really need." And he said, "Then why don't you just go out and do it." And so the egg was hatched in my brain. I said to myself, "You know, we could do something like that."

My specific role was to meet face to face with people and twist their arms. I have a lot of passion for this. If I get in someone's face, it is very hard to say no to me. Although, believe me, people have said no to me. We were not as successful with Assemblyman Hooker as we were with Senator Seward, but it was not for lack of trying. So I think my main role in this was to get my face in other people's faces and use my reputation, my gray hair, my experience, and the fact that I'm pretty well known around here, to try and convince people to go along with this.

My main role was to meet face to face with people that were important for our support, but I didn't do that entirely—Andy did a good deal of that too. Andy handled a lot of the NYC Watershed connection. We all met with Senator Seward and Jim Campion. Once those initial meetings were held, I would turn it over to my staff to work out the details. I got the president of Columbia-Greene Community College to commit to a certain amount of money. It was up to Marilyn to get that all figured out—all of those details. I got WAC [Watershed Agriculture Council] to consider giving us money, but it was up to Andy to actually get the contracts. There is a ton of work in that stuff. A lot of these things call for matches—coming up with this, coming up with that. The staff did all of the administrative work, and I was basically the idea person, the promotion person, and the guy you hand the microphone to talk about it on the radio. This is kind of my style because I detest administrative work. I have no stomach for it and they know that. Andy is smart enough to realize that there are certain things certain people can do, and if you let them do it they do well, don't force them to do things that they don't do well.

I am a good friend with the fellow that owns this place, Eric Rasmussen. He's been a good volunteer. He's also been on our Extension board of directors for many years, and been very active in forestry. Eric was the "Tree Farmer of the Year" not too long ago. We have always used his property across the street, I would say, for the last thirty years. That has been the stage for our conservation field days, where we get 400 or 500 sixth graders in here, and we take them around to different stations. He's got a nice nature trail and a demonstration site over there. So I'm sitting down having coffee and chatting with Eric one day, and I mentioned what John Faso had

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said to me about “go do it” and I said, “Eric, you need to give us some land. Donate us some land, so that we can build this entity I have in my head.” And Eric said, “I think I can do that, I think I can do that. I have to talk to my family, my kids, but I think I can do that for you.”

After Eric had agreed to virtually give us some land over there, I started coming up with some estimates of what it would cost to build a resource center. The estimates of what I got were in the neighborhood of a quarter-million dollars, and I’m thinking there’s no way we’re ever going to get that kind of money, at least not that I could envision. But there was a chance we might be able to get some money from Cornell, either for a learning center or whatever, but certainly not enough to

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build an entire new facility! So I approached Eric about this particular building. The building use to be the recreation hall for his resort across the street. I said, “What about your recreation hall—what are you going to be doing with that?” And Eric said, “I really don’t have any plans. I’m just storing junk in it right now.” And I said, “How about you lease us that building?” And then he said, “I might be interested in that.” About that time, we got

the grant for the distance learning equipment and it was like, “Well, now we’ve got this equipment we’ve got a place we can get virtually for free. He’s not going to charge us a lot of rent because he’d really like it to be used as well as the forest across the street...” So now all I have to do is come up with some money to be able to renovate the building to move forward.

I consider myself a catalyst. A catalyst is something that speeds up a reaction that is probably going to happen anyway. I basically helped a reaction that was going to occur, occur. I sped up the process. This would have happened—maybe not here, maybe not exactly under this situation, but what has happened here would have happened. I think a good metaphor for this would come from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*: “How could such things happen as this?” The metaphor he used is: “When the apple is ripe, it will fall.” I think the apple was ripe, and I just happened to be the guy sitting under the tree when the apple fell and conked him on the head.

I turned the project over to Marilyn and Andy Turner at that point. They were very passionate about this. Marilyn is a special projects coordinator. I said, “Marilyn, boy have I got a job for you. Eric is willing to let us use this building, and

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we need to renovate the building; we need the money.” She said, “We also need to put together some sort of support.” If we were going to look for money, we’d have to get our ducks in order; we’d have to get people who are willing to write letters of support. We needed to find people who would be willing to go along with us. So Marilyn convened a series of meetings where we brought in people that might have some sort of interest in agroforestry. We brought in people from the Maple Producers Association, beekeepers, CCE, Delaware County, Columbia County, the local RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development), Hudson Mohawk RC&D people, farmers, foresters, and the Watershed. We brought in people from the WAC, the Catskill Forest Association, and we invited people from the NYFOA [New York Forest Owners Association]. We invited essentially anyone that might have some sort of interest or stake in agroforestry or forest land use issues. We sat down around the table, had a couple of meetings, gathered data, lined up our support, and then we started putting together presentations for potential funders.

At one point we invited Senator Jim Seward to meet with Andy, Marilyn, and myself to talk about what we are trying to do here. We needed money. We asked him specifically if he could help us out with some financial help. I thought the presentation went well with Senator Seward. And a week later he called up and said, “I’ve got \$50,000 for you.” Well, that really put the impetus to it. Now we had the promise of about \$30,000 in equipment, and another \$50,000 coming from Senator Seward. The initial meeting with Senator Seward was a key turning point, and getting the distance learning equipment was the other. So now we had something that we could parlay.

We then approached the WAC, and got them to commit to \$25,000. I guess that was the third turning point. That was crucial. It was primarily Andy’s doing. Although Marilyn wrote the proposals, I think it was Andy playing golf with JC Shaver that facilitated that. You know as well as I do that a lot of times things happen because of a golf game, or a poker game, or an aside comment, or even a personal relationship. And that’s how things happen. So those were the three features, and again, I credit Andy entirely with getting the learning center, or at least getting the distance learning equipment; of course Marilyn did all of the administrative work on that.

We went to the local community college, which is Columbia-Greene CC. It serves both Columbia and Greene Counties, but it’s located in Columbia County. One of the contentious issues between the college and Greene County is that when a student from Greene County goes to a community college other than Columbia Greene, there’s a charge-back. Basically, the county gets a charge-back from the college. In most counties, the county government pays those fees. In Greene County,

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those charges get passed on to the towns. So there are some towns that are paying \$15,000–\$20,000 per year for charge backs as a result of the fact that their kids are going to colleges other than Columbia-Greene. The Hudson River is a barrier, even though students can actually get their dollar amount back if they go there. So Columbia-Greene is trying to expand their presence on this side of the river. I approached the president of Columbia-Greene, Jim Campion, who has been an acquaintance of mine for about thirty years. I told him we'd like to offer some Columbia-Greene classes on this side of the river, and he said that's what they would like to do too, maybe to help with the charge-back issue. I asked him for some money, and he agreed to support us to the tune of about \$6,000 per year, and in return, I would offer a course. I offer the course that I am now teaching, called "Introduction to Temperate Agroforestry."

I don't think a course has ever been approved this quickly. Normally, it's about a two-year process from the time you put together your course proposal to the time that the students actually show up. Well this all happened in about three months. It had to go through the departments, and I didn't appreciate how much they bent over backwards to accommodate me at the time, but I do now because I now know what's involved in putting together a course. I'm going to offer some more courses here. So the community college agreed to kick in some money.

When passion did not persuade, politics sometimes did. Even though they may not have shared the passion, politically, they could see this as being a good thing. For example, Columbia-Greene CC is a wonderful college, but they don't need me to teach a course. But from a political perspective, it's a good thing for them to be able to go and say to the county legislature, "Look, we're now offering courses on your side of the river; therefore, you should continue to support us." So although Jim Campion may not have shared the passion for what we are doing here, he sure is smart enough to know that politically it's a good idea. It was in his self-interest to do this. With other groups like the Empire State Ginseng Growers Association, again, it is in their business interest to support an entity like this too.

So passion is good, but you really need to convince people that from a practical standpoint it's going to be good for them. That's very hard to do if you're thinking long-term. You can convince somebody that if you do something today it's going to pay back two years from now. But it's hard to convince somebody that by planting this little maple tree that in thirty years, this tree is going to be better than that tree over there. To say, "Mr. Maple Producer, you're going to be dead when these trees are producing." To convince people that it's in the self-interest of their industry is the trick, and we were able to do that to a great extent. When passion doesn't work, politics and self-interest do help. Even Andy, though he's impassioned to do

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this, somewhere down the line might decide he doesn't want to be the executive director of CCE. He might decide he wants to be the president of the board of the ARC. That could happen. Marilyn might even want to be the education coordinator for this particular entity. She's wearing that hat now in addition to her other hats. So you have to find some self-interest among your partners to push it forward, because your passion alone is not going to carry it.

We didn't ask any local legislators for money at that point. We pretty much were going to try to do this without going to our local funders to ask for more money—they had been kind to us. We soon found that we had enough pieces of the puzzle together and then another important person came on board. We had this old building, which was an old recreation hall, but we needed a learning center. I happen to have a good friend who is an architect, named John Tobin. John taught at RPI [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute] for a number of years, and now he is in private practice. He and his wife, a former 4-H agent, have been very good friends of mine. He is a superbly talented architect. I said, "John, do you think you could have a look-see at our building?" Before I knew it, John had jumped in with both feet. He did the design and the planning; he did so much work in terms of designing the structure, and he did it for free! So that was another big, big bonus that came out of it. All of these other people that we had worked with since we had enlisted their support were willing to support us however they could. They didn't have any money, but they would do what they could. A lot of them would help us with "this or that." So with all of our supporters, we had enough money to go ahead with the renovation.

You need to convince people in the community, to instill some sense of pride in them. You need to remind people that there are good things happening in the community. Everything you see in the news is all negative; it's all the bad things that happened in your community. You need people going around the community saying what a great community it is and what wonderful assets the community has, but only if people would use them. That's a message that we don't get out. There are not enough people bragging about Greene County. There are not enough people bragging about the northern Catskills. That's what I do: I brag. I tell people how wonderful their community is, and how they can make their community the showcase of the world. When I go speak to the Rotary group in Windham, I don't say, "We're building something that's going to be

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a star in Greene County.” I say, “We’re building something that’s going to be a star in the whole northeast.”

People really have a low self-esteem in rural areas in general. Rural communities, particularly poor rural communities, (and we’re certainly not a rich county) have suffered from a lack of self-esteem. They don’t realize the wonderful resources that they have available to them within their community. You do need to be a cheerleader; you do need to convince people that there is a sense of community,

that it can be something really good. If you start telling people that what they are doing is great, that their community is great, pretty soon they will start believing it. That’s how you get their support. If you don’t tell them, they don’t know it, and they don’t think they can do anything until you convince them that what they do have going is a good thing.

I love taking people that may start as a volunteer on a small sub-committee of a planning board, for example,

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and I watch these people develop as they realize that they can actually do things. The whole process of taking a person from a community and turning them into a leader is a wonderful thing. I think we do this well in Extension. We empower people. I don’t particularly like that term, but I think it fits in this case: empowering local citizens to realize that they can make a difference. I think we all tend to be a little bit lazy, a little apathetic; we’ll wait for somebody else to do it. If you can actually empower someone by convincing them that they can make a difference, then you’ve created something very powerful.

You are doomed to failure unless you have widespread support, but you cannot let the inmates get control of the asylum. You have to have their support, but you can’t give up control, and you can’t do anything big by committee. It’s important to get support, but it’s equally important to have people that are willing to take action and responsibility for their actions. Andy took a tremendous gamble with this. He was willing to convince our board of directors that we should lay out all this money in the hope that we are going to get it back. It was Andy who convinced the board of directors to allow him to work on this, to allow me to work on this. It’s not an issue of “if I’m not working on this, what else am I working on?” It is not an issue because I do other things. It would only take about two or three board members

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who say, “This is a half-baked, cockamamie idea. This is crazy; this is not what you should be doing in Greene County.” All it would have taken to thwart this project at almost any step along the way would have been for a half a dozen people in the community to say that this was a bad idea, that this was something that we should not be using our resources to do. That didn’t happen, and it didn’t happen because people like Andy and Marilyn had the vision. We basically made them an offer that they couldn’t refuse. So you need to be committed, and you need to be passionate about it. I also learned that passion does not always persuade as much as I’d like it to.

There’s a neat story there. We put the job out to bid, there weren’t that many bids that had come in, and we accepted the low bid. No sooner had we accepted the low bid than the person who had made the bid called us up and said, “I have made a terrible mistake. I underestimated my bid by a good \$20,000”. His bid was for \$66,000, and he said it was going to cost a good \$88,000 to do what we wanted to do. We could either re-bid the job, or we could say, “OK, go ahead.” Well, we said, “OK, go ahead.” Andy made the decision to agree and then hope that we could work with this builder. That in itself had a dramatic effect. The contractor was stupefied that we had agreed to the fact that he had just upped his bid by 25%. Well he came in and did the job for his original bid, actually a little bit less than his original bid. He worked very closely with the architect, and he was able to do the job. So it turns out that we did get the building renovated for what we were looking for. It was great. That was a surprise that turned out all right.

The most serious disappointment was when we met with Assemblyman Hooker, who was newly elected. Basically, we did the same pitch that we did for Senator Seward, but we got the exact opposite reaction. Assemblyman Hooker said he would not support this. He thought it was a great idea, but his political philosophy was that funding for an entity such as this should come from the private sector, not the public sector. He said there would be no line item money coming from him, and he said this in a nice way, but that was disappointing. That was the only time that Andy, Marilyn and I were actually bummed.

We were also a little disappointed when we took Mr. Hooker’s advice, which was to go to the private sector and solicit funding from all these foundations and private organizations that have some aspect in forestry. We did go to those at his suggestion and received virtually nothing from the private sector. So that was a bit of a disappointment. I forget the exact number of solicitations, but I think we sent out more than fifty or sixty and we didn’t get a dime. We did get a little help from our local bank, and our Chamber of Commerce is hopefully going to support us to a certain extent. That was kind of a gray day when we sent out all of those letters and

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got nothing back in return—even from people that I really thought would be donors. You know, when you really believe in a project that someone else doesn't support, it makes you feel like you're not doing something right or you're not worthwhile. You try not to take it personally, but you do.

Other than that, there was a little moment of trepidation when the class was coming here to meet for the first time. It was 11:00 AM and the class was due to be here at 2:00 PM. We had no desks, no tables, no chairs—our furniture hadn't been delivered yet! Marilyn was frantically on the phone calling the office supply company: "You've got to get those tables. We've got students coming out here this afternoon!" By noon, the tables and chairs arrived, and by 1:00 we were set up, and at 2:00 the students arrived.

Then Marilyn went to work on lining up other things that we were going to do here. I was going to teach the college course, but this is not set up just to teach a college course. This is set up for other things, like meetings. However, we've been having credit free courses here. Marilyn has been booking meetings; NYFOA met here and the CCE executive directors met here. So Marilyn has been very busy organizing the schedule of activities that take place here at the ARC. She continues to work on that. I had almost nothing to do on the administrative side—calling meetings, setting up appointments. I did not write letters. I looked at letters that were being sent out and I made suggestions. I did not attend many of the meetings in which the actual strategy was being planned on how to do it, other than enlisting John Tobin's aid. I don't think I was at this building at all when it was being renovated. I had very little to do with the actual nuts and bolts, the nitty-gritty of turning this recreation hall into the Agroforestry Center.

Sometimes if you are nice to people, if you do the right thing, it pays you back. Like Andy going with the contractor instead of re-bidding the job, and hoping he would do the right thing—he did the right thing and then some. Also, even though this building is not in the NYC watershed per se, the fact that the watershed people were still willing to commit to it I think was a very positive thing because they believed in the mission. We also got breaks from the office equipment people. We do a lot of business with a particular office supply company, buying a lot of paper and equipment. The company that we've been doing business with all these years literally sold us our desks, tables and chairs at 50%, because they've appreciated our business over the years. The deal with the office equipment worked out very well.

It was just a whole bunch of people sharing a vision who all seemed to think that this is something that should happen now. Ten or fifteen people had the same thought on what this thing could do for the future. It was something like an idea whose time had come, and we just happened to be in the right place at the right

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time for it to happen.

A local forester named Mike Greason is an amazing person. He's a retired DEC [Department of Environmental Conservation] forester, but Mike is also one of the greatest volunteers I've ever worked with. He is very active with NYFOA. He's a bit of a maverick. He works in the private industry as a forestry consultant. He doesn't work on commission like most foresters do; he works on an hourly basis. He really tends to think more long-term and is much more interested in the welfare of the forest than he is in the welfare of the forest owner. Mike really made a nice connection to the private sector, talking about this organization, supporting it with his own tremendous efforts, and also getting other volunteers to jump on board. So Mike's connection with the private sector was extremely important. He was a big player in that regard.

Eric Rasmussen, who is a forester by training, owns this land. He has hosted the conservation field days for the past 30 years. He has made the forest available to our students and us at all times. He has this passion for what we are trying to do here and has been as supportive as anyone possible can be. I mean Eric and his wife were over here washing the windows the day before the center opened. They were mowing the grass and planting flowers, stuff that they are not the least bit required to. He had this piece of property surveyed and put on a separate deed, so when he sold the resort, this would be an entity unto itself. I could anticipate all sorts of red tape if this was still tied to the resort across the street. Eric is quite a character with more energy and passion than you could ever expect from someone. Another character was John Tobin, the architect. I never in my life dreamed that he would spend maybe a hundred hours or more of his time working on this project. Coming down here twice a week meeting with the builder and the guys who were doing the work—getting things for free.

A real key player was Senator Seward. Senator Seward had the foresight, even when he was here for the opening ceremony, to say, "Look, this is important." He said, "I couldn't spell agroforestry when I met with you folks. I had no idea what you were talking about. But I recognized right away that it was something important, something that was going to happen, and that we had the chance to be on the leading edge."

There were a lot of people in the background. They were the ginseng growers, who have their own agenda; the beekeepers, who have their own agenda; the maple producers, who have their own agenda; and the watershed people, who basically have their own agenda as far as NYC is concerned. So there were a lot of characters that we dealt with along the way.

Andy, in particular, is the most committed person I've met. Philosophically,

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he believes in wise land use and sustainability—all these buzzwords that politicians like to throw around—but I don’t know how many of them believe it to the extent that Andy absolutely believes it. Andy passionately believes in making a difference in people’s lives and preserving the rural character of places like Greene County while having sustainable development, as does Marilyn. Both of them are extremely passionate and willing to work twice as hard as anyone to see these goals accomplished. Both of these people have great, great long-term vision. Neither one of them has any sort of an ego, “what’s in it for me” type of deal. Basically, “What can we do for our community that’s going to make it a better place down the line?” And they’re not just passionate; you need skills too. They are also good at what they do and did a fantastic job.

In retrospect I don’t think we could have preceded much differently than we actually did. I think we just got lucky. I think the fact that we had brought together this large core group of people to solicit support—to get talking about this. Yet all of the decision-making and all of the actual doing was basically Marilyn and Andy. I think it’s great to get a whole bunch of people on your side, but when it comes to getting things done you cannot do things if you have to deal with a committee of ten or twelve people. There is no board of directors for this entity yet. We haven’t even gotten into governance. Some organizations would say, “First you start with your governance, and then you put together your overall structure, and then you build it.” Well, I think that would have hindered the process. This whole thing

happened in less than two years from concept to the classroom. I think what made it happen was most of the decision-making was in the hands of three people—Andy, Marilyn and myself. Primarily one person did the logistics, so you didn’t have to carbon copy thirty

**This whole thing happened in less than two years from concept to the classroom.**

people every time you made a decision.

I’m sure there are important people that we overlooked in terms of soliciting support. Even though we tried to literally include anybody who might have something to say, there were probably some areas we could have worked harder in, for example, The Nature Conservancy. There are probably some organizations that we did not push as hard as we should have, and maybe we spent too much time working with some other agencies and people that really couldn’t do much but lip service. There’s been a notable lack of work with the DEC on this. I think that they could have been an important partner. I think the DEC is so big and so political that they are a little bit more difficult to work with. But I think there might have

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been some other private players that we probably could have approached from the beginning.

It was always a concern of ours that we didn't want to let the "inmates get control of the asylum" either. We wanted to maintain control of the decision making process until this thing becomes a self-sustaining entity, which is our goal. We had a meeting here the other day talking about that. We didn't want to get involved with someone who was going to call the shots and make the rules. We had our vision and we didn't want to change our vision for any particular players' self interests. That can happen; I've seen that happen.

We had a good deal of support from the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell. Louise Buck, Gary Goff, Pete Smallidge, and a number of people from the Department of Natural Resources came to the meetings. They came out here from Cornell, and yes, their presence sitting around a table makes a big difference, even if they are not "big players" per se. They are, to a certain extent, in that they are helping with the teaching, but just the fact that they came to the table, that they lent their support to it, certainly made the job a little bit easier. We were very fortunate. I really think that this happened much easier than it could have. It could have been a lot harder than it actually was. We were really lucky.

**What I learned from my experience of organizing the ARC is that I am surrounded by talented people.**

The most rewarding aspect of this project for me was the fact that the local community college would trust me to teach. I am now faculty at Columbia-Greene Community College. I personally am gratified that they think that I can do this—that I am qualified enough to teach their students. That was the biggest gratification to me, the fact that I do have students coming here. That's what really rocks my boat right now—working with the students. That's going to continue. I can see myself eight to ten years down the line when I retire from CCE. I'll probably still be a part-time faculty member, and I'll probably still teach classes here because I really enjoy doing that.

What I learned from my experience of organizing the ARC is that I am surrounded by talented people. I learned that there are people that will support a person if they think that they've got a winning proposition. I learned if you work really hard on something for twenty years, you could be an overnight success. I've learned that it is very important to maintain good relationships with people in the media because if you don't get good press, you're dead.

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I've also learned that sometimes the process is more rewarding than the fulfillment. Sometimes the chase is more rewarding than the hunt. Why do I hunt? I hunt because I like to hunt. Do I like to kill animals? No, I don't like to kill animals; I like to hunt. For example, when we had the grand opening a couple weeks ago, there were about 150 people crammed into this place. We had invited about forty, but it's an election year. I don't know if that's why, but we had about 150 people here. I sat by myself in the back room and it was like, "Aww, gees, it's really opening." It was bittersweet. I thought, "How did this happen so quickly? I really didn't have anything to do with this." But I did. So I learned that sometimes accomplishing your goals is not nearly as important as working towards your goals.

I learned that there are many people who share the same thoughts, the same ideas and the same passion. I'm always amazed at the talent of the people I work with and how smart they are. I knew that to begin with, but sometimes even your staff surprises you. I really was not disappointed with anyone involved in this project. I've been disappointed by people in other projects, people who made commitments they didn't keep, but that was not the case with this project. Virtually everyone who agreed to do something did it. No one at the last moment said, "I can't do what I said I would do." It was amazing that everybody who committed to do something

**I learned that there are people that will support a person if they think that they've got a winning proposition. I learned if you work really hard on something for twenty years, you could be an overnight success.**

did what he or she said they would do and even went beyond it. I didn't expect Eric to be up here washing the windows, cleaning up the garbage, mowing the grass. I taught other people that it's good to dream, that dreams sometimes come true. That was good for Andy in particular because Andy is so idealistic anyway. It was nice for him to see that someone can have a dream and that if people work together the dream really can come true.

Other people have wondered, "Why is this crazy man working on ginseng? What is the point?" I think there have been a lot of people, particularly at the university, that have wondered, "Where is this going?" A lot of people are now saying "Holy Smokes! This guy is not just an isolated nut-case, he's kind of on the wave here, on the edge of something that is happening, and maybe he's not as crazy as we thought he was."

So I think some people, particularly at Cornell, have been quite a bit surprised that we have accomplished this. Some people in some departments are saying, "How

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did they do this when we are struggling with budgets and we're letting people go?" We're letting people go too; we're all struggling with budgets. We surprised a lot of people. We had some local legislators here from the county that were wondering "How did they do this without our money? How did they do this without our support?" A lot of them were pretty well surprised. Some people have learned that you can do things if you work really hard. Hopefully my students will learn something too.

The first bit of advice I would give you is to find some like-minded people, people who share your vision. Of course, you have to have a vision, and I'm assuming that a new educator interested in doing something like this has a vision for it. So the first step is to find people who share your vision because you can't do it yourself. The second thing you need to do is to put together a team of people that has some basic skills. You need someone who is going to be a very good administrator—someone who is going to write the letters, who is going to be able to call the meetings and do a lot of the paperwork. You need someone who is not going to be afraid to ask for money. So you need someone who is not shy; who is outgoing, and is as part of your team.

You are also going to need as many allies as you can possibly get. So you need to start building not just a few like-minded people, but you need to start building support among a lot of different groups and organizations. So you get your team in place, get your support in place, and are able to articulate what is crucial about what you are going to do. I think there are a lot of people that just want to do good things. I think from the very beginning we were able to articulate our three main objectives, which are teaching, research, and extension in the distance sense of extension—not just extension in the county, but extension to work in the world. Be able to articulate some of the basic things you want to do, then put your team together.

Give yourself a timeline. We had a five-year timeline, but we did this in two years. Actually set up a timeline, set some goals for yourself, and what you wish to accomplish by a specific timeline. Figure out what it takes to achieve those goals. Line up the people to do it; it's got to be a team approach. There were a lot of three person meetings between Andy, Marilyn, and myself. It was here that the three of us sat down and said, "What are we going to do next? Where are we going to go? Who's doing what?" We would leave these meetings with a list of things that we

**The first bit of advice I would give you is to find some like-minded people, people who share your vision.**

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were going to do. For example: “Hey Bob, you call Jim Campion at Columbia-Greene. Get an appointment to sit down and talk to him.” “Marilyn, start drafting a letter to the watershed people.” “Andy, talk with so and so to see if we can get this, this, and this...” There should be a lot of meetings between the management team to set your goals. You should always have a plan B. If plan A fails, you’ve got to have a plan B. Go at it.

As I look back at our mistakes, we tended to over-commit. This was a big deal, a big project, and it took a tremendous amount of energy from a lot of different people. I came very close to burning myself out because of my other commitments

**Be very, very careful when you take on a project this big that you don’t already have so much to do that you can’t do it right.**

and responsibilities. To be honest, I worked seven days a week for almost a month and a half, not just on this project, but on all these other things that I had done in conjunction with this. So be very, very careful when you take on a project this big that you don’t already have so much to do that you

can’t do it right. I’m just now catching my breath from what has been almost two months of seven days per week work. It’s been difficult. It’s OK, but if you’ve got a family, you’ve got little kids; you’re not going to be able to put the time in. I’m a single guy. I can work seven days a week without too much of a problem—especially if you love your work. That’s the advice I would give. Take care of your family, which is most important. I see a lot of younger Extension agents, and I get a little bit nervous when I see how much they are working. I know that in Extension the more you work and your reputation grows, the more people will come after you to do things. It’s very gratifying work to have people think that you’re the expert or that you have done something remarkable, and they want to get close to you as a result of that. But the gratification that you get from your work is only one type of gratification, and you need to have a life in addition to your job. That’s probably where people like myself fail, because we do so much work.

As a new Extension agent, you need to try to maintain a balance between work and family. It’s great if your work is something that you are passionate about in your private life, but you really should not allow your work to become your life, as I have done. I’m not holding myself up as an example for anybody else. I’ve been very happy; I have no complaints. But in looking back over the last 25 years, I’ve been married twice and divorced twice. I’ve paid the price for my passion. But I have no complaints.

I’ve become more of a dreamer as I’ve gotten older. I originally thought of this

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as my swan song. For many years I've wanted to do an international ginseng conference. I've worked with ginseng for so long that it was kind of like "I want to do this, I want to do this." This was important for my life and my career. So I did the ginseng conference, but that was not the swan song yet. So what was I going to do? I wanted to leave a mark. So then the ARC was going to be the swan song, but it was going to take longer. Now I'm thinking the swan hasn't sung yet and I'm not done yet.

I think that as I get older, I tend to dream a bit more. When I was younger, I was dreaming about having a job in five years. Now I'm 53 years old, and I'm going to retire, eventually. I know I'm not immortal anymore. It takes you a while to realize that. I'd like there to be something to look back on that someone could say that I had an effect somewhere along the line. The older you get the more you become a student of other people and what they have done. When I look at some of the remarkable things that have been accomplished by people like Liberty Hyde Bailey, Ezra Cornell, and people like that, you say, "Wow, those people were spectacular. They were people with a vision and a dream. They were able to get other people to work with them to make things happen."

# profile

## Marilyn Wyman

*Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Greene County*

I've been involved in agriculture, natural resources and community development education for eleven years working at Cooperative Extension in Greene County. The kind of

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**David Kay**

**April, 2004**

work I do is varied and involves writing, speaking, and networking. I've worked on many different grants. I entered working on

recycling and solid waste management at Cornell. Since then I have held a variety of positions. At one point I was interim Executive Director. Most of my expertise has been in agriculture and

natural resources. I've been involved in the development of the regional farmer's market and tourism initiatives that impact agriculture and natural resources. I also promoted policy initiatives that will help guide our community in its relationship to agriculture and natural resources. Recently I've become more involved in issues that relate to forestry and the economic implications of agroforestry practices in our community.

My job is Special Projects Coordinator. I worked for the past few years on the environmental risk factors of breast cancer, specifically with rural and agricultural communities. I've worked with the USDA to facilitate heritage-based community focus groups on tourism and put together a heritage tourism trail guide for the county. As a representative of Extension, I participate with and I'm a council member of the Hudson Mohawk Resource Conservation and Development. I am also an ap-



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pointed councilperson on the Hudson River Tourism Development Council for Greene County, which is the economic development component of the Hudson Valley Greenway. We received an award from the Hudson Mohawk RCD because of our work with them. We're always looking at the implications of regional collaborations for Greene County. We appreciate and value regional collaboration.

Currently, I'm working on four initiatives. I'm one of the chairpersons of the Biodiversity Project Work Team. We received funding and helped to host a biodiversity workshop and photography contest this past May. The contest is a two county initiative to get the general public involved in taking pictures and writing descriptions of biodiversity. We're going to have a reception at the Columbia Greene Community College and then do some photography shows in different places throughout the Columbia and Greene County areas. We also collaborate with the E. N. Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station. We held a biodiversity conference at the Preserve with the Cornell Biodiversity Project Work Team. We've done educational retreats and programs for 4-H at the Preserve. We've had cross-programmatic support with each other. It's been very beneficial for both organizations.

The second initiative is to develop four newsletters that highlight different resources that address forestry management and agroforestry practices through funding from the Watershed Ad Council. Forestry is an important area for our county but not one that's often been addressed within Extension. We felt that this was a good way to create partnerships and network with people in the NYC watershed including the Catskill Forest Association, Watershed Ag, Catskill Watershed Corporation and the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development. I've gotten to know all the directors who are associated with those organizations. I write and edit a four-page newsletter. One was published in August and we're putting others out in October, February and June.

Another initiative is to secure funding for a sustainable landscape distance learning center. It involves writing a proposal to renovate a building and distance learning technology for the center. The funding is through Cornell. We're focusing on creating one central location where many organizations can provide information on agriculture and natural resources to the general public. Additionally it will be a place where people from Cornell and other universities can do research and provide technical training and adult education for people in our region. We're working with Columbia-Greene Community College on developing an agroforestry course for an environmental studies program. I'm in the process of writing a business plan to get the funding we need to create the facility, then develop the organization and infrastructure for the programs to be held there. Bob Beyfuss is very involved in

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agroforestry processes and Mick Bessire is helping me with the agricultural part. Everybody helps with the potential program overviews. We are looking at a three-year time frame. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County will be the lead organization because of the technology that we're going to receive, but we anticipate that this will become more of a consortium. Maybe it will be a nonprofit organization. We have a lot of support from one individual in terms of the facility itself, Eric Rasmussen, who has made a building available to house the facility.

The fourth initiative I coordinate with my co-worker Mick Bessire. It is the Catskill Region farmer's market, which has been really significant as far as illustrating our value to the Greene County legislature. I believe the County sees us as integral partners. We helped secure the funding through Housing and Urban Development of the Canal Corridor Initiative for the renovation of the Catskill Point. It is a warehouse and an interpretive center right on Hudson River. Catskill Point now houses the Catskill region farmer's market. Statistics from our second year show we have had an average of 450 people come every Saturday. It's the only regular event that happens at the Point. Mick and I help organize and promote the members of the Catskill regional farmer's market and process all the WIC coupon forms for the nutrition education program. These forms are required by the Department of Ag and Markets for the vendors to be able to sell to WIC participants.

In the beginning it was quite challenging because we also have a number of vendors from the Catskill Regional Farmer's Market selling on the Thruway. This represents a whole other set of bureaucracies that we're dealing with, not only Ag & Markets, but also the Thruway Authority. Last year in particular, there were a lot of issues with the Thruway about the needs of farmers at the farmer's market. The Ag and Markets staff tried to help intercept but there are politics of how the Thruway regulates business at their rest stops. On a number of occasions we offered to facilitate meetings to help this run more smoothly. Mick has been involved in the day to day responsibilities. He is good on the ground and has an excellent rapport with local farmers. We had an intern that luckily helps on-site.

Farmers markets are a wonderful opportunity to really help promote Cornell Cooperative Extension because we have a huge sign that says "Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County," Mick is involved with the organizational piece making sure the farmers are where they need to be. We're now in the process of turning over the organization to the farmers themselves. This year we had them vote a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and Treasurer; so that we can start weaning ourselves away from that particular aspect of it though we'll stay engaged in it. As a resource in the community, we step back and let participants take over the organizational part. The Catskill Regional Farmer's Market is one thing that we've helped

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get off the ground and organize. We'll probably always be a presence on a regular basis at the farmer's market. It doesn't seem like there's an association between biodiversity and the Catskill Regional Farmer's Market. But these weave together as far as a sense of community and what we're trying to preserve, to help people appreciate this community and also be able to make a reasonably decent living.

My motivation is my understanding and appreciation of the value that natural resources and agriculture play in this region. That gets me up in the morning. I am able to come to work and know that I have fairly good relationships with a lot of the key players in this region on issues that impact the preservation of our sense of community, not just agriculture and natural resources, but also the rural culture. It's looking at our Northern Catskill region to help make sure that the best decisions are made based on accurate information. We don't just look at the boundaries of the county. We help people get together. We know we need to sit down and talk about what's going on and help clear the air instead of getting in specific camps that prevent us from really understanding how a lot of our goals are the same. We often just don't sit down and talk about them.

**My motivation is my understanding and appreciation of the value that natural resources and agriculture play in this region. That gets me up in the morning.**

Many of the issues we deal with involve sustainability. Why should you support local farmers? Why should you adopt appropriate forest management practices? The role of collegiality within the office and with partners is really important. We are building relationships with our partners. People write articles and letters to the editor about the positive contributions that we make and how we are an organization that people can turn to, a nonbiased organization that people trust to help them work through issues. Part of it is our information base, but also we've created a sense of trust amongst our partners. I use the word "we" because even if it's me, I wouldn't be me without the "we" without my fellow staff members. If I didn't have the platform and the support of the people around me, I wouldn't be effective. I wouldn't be able to go to workshops that help me develop skills that help improve what I do out in the community.

My background is in environmental science ecology. That's what I was trained in. I actually have two jobs. I work with Cooperative Extension and I also developed the environmental science programs for a biological research station where I live. My husband is the executive director. It's a job I was doing before I came to Extension. I had an opportunity to do a solid waste management / recycling educa-

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tion program in Greene County. That was my entry point into Extension. I knew about Cooperative Extension because every Saturday growing up in Rockland County I sat and listened to Ralph Snod-Smith talk about gardens with my father. That was something special that my father and I shared. It was my introduction to the horticulture aspect of Cooperative Extension. Later, I became much more interested in the other aspects of Cooperative Extension, the organization itself. I saw Extension as a platform. There were links between ecology, agriculture, and natural resources that, as an ecologist, I felt were important. You have to be able to bring ecological principles to people's everyday work, their businesses, how they live their lives, and how they make the choices that they make. I saw this as a great opportunity to network out in the community. With the research station, I didn't have the budget or the connections to do this. My work with the research station wasn't always positive because it was "environmentally" identified by rural community residents. Cooperative Extension allowed me to create a credibility with the community that possibly wouldn't have been cultivated if I had just stayed with the research station.

My parents were always involved in community service. My father was a trustee in our village of Nyack, in Rockland County, New York. They were involved in volunteer organizations like the fire company. My mother always worked at the polls and I think that this idea of being involved in your community was always a part of my upbringing. When I was young I don't think that I saw the linkage or the

**You have to be able to bring ecological principles to people's everyday work, their businesses, how they live their lives, and how they make the choices that they make.**

opportunities that could be provided in community outreach. I was more content focused. I didn't know how I could do community outreach. I could create curriculum but as far as taking it beyond those boundaries into a more informal setting where there really weren't any guidelines, I don't think I saw how to do that. That's definitely evolved through my experience at Extension. I have had the opportunity to

be involved as an administrator, represent an organization, present and defend a budget and understand long term planning. I also learned to understand the role of a board of directors and other stakeholders and understand how a county and Cornell all weave together. Another part of my job is to go out and talk to project directors of different programs within the county.

I've also had the opportunity to participate in the Northeast Leadership De-

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velopment (NELD) training. It was phenomenal experience to develop skills and have a network of other people from other states to measure what was going on and to get input. I think participating in that training helped me continue on the path that led me to do what I do today. It's something that's evolved as I gained skills. I became more effective and confident to stick my neck out. I can now get in front of a group of people, even under contentious situations, and try to bring some kind of organization or structure to it so people feel they're moving forward on something.

My husband Rick has been a key mentor. He is a researcher and as a researcher he's always questioned or queried me on what it is I do and how I do it. He forces me to reiterate or explain different approaches that I've taken. Mick and Bob definitely offered support within my own network of Ag and Natural Resources and undoubtedly, without a doubt, Andy Turner, the director of Greene County Extension during his four years, has been indispensable. I think this idea of taking issues out into the community and becoming more process and facilitation focused is something that's happened because of Andy's leadership. We might have been doing it before but we didn't understand it.

This whole area of facilitation is new, which is exciting and also scary because we sometimes invent it as we go along. I think of the impact that I've seen and there is not any one specific situation that I can refer to, but rather the confirmations, the "gee, I really appreciate that," or "that was really important," or "you really helped move us forward." I think it's been instilled into the projects that we're doing now like Mick incorporating a conflict resolution clause in our ag and farmland protection plan or participating in diversity workshops. I think these initiatives are starting to filter into our culture at Extension. It's one awareness that pulls in other awareness's and then it becomes part of the culture of your organization. The result is we're being identified as a resource in our county so that other organizations are looking to us.

I'm going to tell you a story about a project in the Town of Cairo that I was involved in. One of our board members was involved in a committee that had been appointed by the town supervisor to look into the issue of zoning in the town of Cairo. The Cooperative Extension of Greene County office is in the town of Cairo. We've worked with the Town of Cairo on a number of initiatives, like the County Youth Fair that is held in the town park next to Extension. In this case, the supervisor created this committee and selected three pro-zoning and three non-zoning committee members. There were also two town councilmen who were, in theory, neutral. The Extension Board member was concerned that people were going into this process with very clear territories about zoning and were going to fight for their positions. It was not going to be an opportunity to educate the community about

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zoning; it was really going to be a debate.

The Board member asked if we had any resources he could bring to the committee. I said, “You should show them this tape, it might help guide their understanding of opportunities or perspective on what could or couldn’t happen to the community.” The tape was by Ed McMahon. It had to do with communities looking to the future in a sustainable way and on how you create a vision for your community’s future. After hearing the presentation, I got a videotape of it because I liked Ed McMahon and what he said. The video is a good generic overview about getting people together to make decisions that everybody can live with across a range of audiences. As a result of viewing that tape, the committee asked Cooperative Extension to help facilitate a process they decided they needed to go through.

Andy asked me if I would do this and I said sure.

**Instead of saying, “These are the guidelines we’re going to deal with,” I told them ... “We will speak in ways that help us achieve the broadest and deepest understanding rather than speaking to win debating points.”**

I created an overview about what needed to happen at that first meeting. I crafted an agenda that specifically talked about what their expectations were. I made assumptions about how the meeting should proceed. Instead of saying, “These are the guidelines we’re going to deal with,” I told them I assumed that “We’re here to represent the best interests of the town of Cairo. We

will speak in ways that help us achieve the broadest and deepest understanding rather than speaking to win debating points. We’ll listen thoughtfully. We will assume that no one has the entire answer, that everyone is part of the answer and we’ll come away from this with a recommendation to present to the Cairo town board.” Going into this I knew, we need ground rules, a structure where everybody felt comfortable and that they could work under. I asked, “Do we all agree to this?” They all agreed to it, because we couldn’t move forward unless we agreed to those “assumptions” instead of ground rules. I used the word “assumptions” because I figured “ground rules” was too rule oriented. Then I told them what the process was going to be. For this particular meeting it was for everybody to have five minutes to talk about what his or her concerns were. Later we were going to determine the goals, what they wanted to accomplish, how they felt they could accomplish those goals and to develop a plan to achieve them. It would be those goals and plan that would be presented to the town board, the town supervisor and the town council.

The ideas for this meeting came from the NELD training and information

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that Andy had discussed with me. He said, “Look at this, here’s some potential ways of structuring this,” because I hadn’t done this. We had done a Greene County legislature large-scale facilitation, but not anything so personal or potentially volatile. I really felt it was more important to create a good atmosphere with these six or eight people, than to do anything on a grander scale. I wanted to really make it personal. It was a brand new setting for me.

I distributed a handout from Tim Conant from Cornell, called “What’s So Bad About Zoning.” It was an overview about zoning, which I felt was important for the committee to read. I had to stay neutral on this topic but I also had to have them understand where zoning fit in to the bigger picture. It was informational and it starts out with, “Whatever you do, don’t use the Z word.” He talked about different myths associated with the zoning. It was good because everybody could relate to one of the myths. It helped neutralize the angst in this group because sometimes zoning is good and sometimes zoning is bad.

At this early point, I had no way of figuring out what the goals were going to be and they didn’t know what their goals were going to be. They knew they had to come up with a set of goals and they thought that their goals were to determine whether the community wanted zoning or not. This proved to be incorrect. Initially, I was there to provide them with information and educate them about zoning, then help them to get some kind of indication from the community about whether they wanted zoning. I also talked to the Greene County Planning Department where I knew somebody who had been unsuccessful in addressing zoning in Cairo in ’96.

From going through this process with my own community, I knew I had to be well prepared. My understanding was that zoning was a tool that could be implemented once a community had an updated master plan, if they didn’t have that they really couldn’t make a decision whether zoning was appropriate or not. Also, the only way to have a good comprehensive master plan was to go back and find out what is the community’s vision for itself. I said, “I’m just going to throw this out to you because this is information you should know regarding zoning. You have to go through this process”. It was at that point during the initial 3 hour meeting that they came to the conclusion that their goal wasn’t to debate zoning. Each camp came to this meeting with people to present their views. They were definitely pro and con positions. But they backtracked and said, “Really what we need to do is understand community visioning and consider revising our master plan.”

Their master plan hadn’t been updated since the early ’70s and they needed to determine whether or not zoning fit into what they wanted to do. I knew what they were thinking of doing didn’t make sense. So I facilitated a shift from thinking

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about zoning to a process to proceed with community visioning. I just presented them with the information that illustrated that zoning needed these other steps to happen first. It was an FYI. I didn't have to know all the nuances about zoning and the development of master plans, but I did know that this was probably going to be the best approach for this committee. It was important for them to feel safe doing that, and for them to unanimously agree. Everybody felt safe with that and agreed. These were fairly polarized people. They were people who had been on opposite sides of this issue for a long time. For them to collectively step back and agree was an accomplishment. They all felt comfortable going back to the town supervisor and the council and saying look, this is what we're going to propose, all of us.

**I knew what they were thinking of doing didn't make sense. So I facilitated a shift from thinking about zoning to a process to proceed with community visioning.**

Ultimately, I believe all of the people in that room wanted what was best for the town of Cairo. They felt that it was important to have their community members educated about these issues and then have a way to provide input. I think they all felt comfortable with the fact that if we educate the community adequately, we're going to have an informed group of

community members who would come back and make an informed decision. They all felt comfortable that something wasn't going to be railroaded through, that there was going to be a broader community understanding of the choices that needed to be made. Perhaps they stepped back because nobody felt comfortable with the idea of the community voting pro or con. It was also an opportunity to allow the broader community to talk about their concerns.

One of the most vocal people against zoning in the community was somebody who's been disenfranchised from the community on a number of levels, not just on this issue. He'd been disenfranchised from public hearings concerning school budgets and a whole variety of things. He did not have a lot of family connections in the community. He came up from the city. I made the councilmen aware of this issue because of their leadership. He had been criticized, and might have even been fined, for not doing something in his yard, for something considered unsightly. He really didn't have the money or any network of people to help him resolve the problem. It put him in a corner and made him feel angry. I think he saw this as a platform to vent his frustration. What was good for this individual was the opportunity to talk but he didn't want to do it in the group setting. He helped me bring papers to the car, and talked about his frustrations and fear of other people taking

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power away from him and dictating to him what can and can't happen. It was really important that I heard him.

At another point moving through the process, he said something to me about being intimidated by "you educated people." He had a high school degree and some technical training. I tried to be thoughtful about that in speaking so that he and other people didn't feel that the people that were pro zoning were more educated and had higher incomes. Those were things that ideologically separated the two groups. I was trying to bridge that in the way I ran the meetings by establishing relationships and sharing information. I said to some of the community members, "I know he's frustrating sometimes but do you understand some of the reasons behind this. You'll get farther with this person if you are a little more thoughtful in how you respond to him." Sometimes it worked and sometimes I just had to cut him off and move on.

Those were things that I learned in the NELD workshops, how you deal with people in a meeting that you know that are derailing the process. I could do this one on one, asking what was bothering him, being interested in him and making him feel like his opinion counted. I would avoid that critical point where people felt like their perspective wasn't being listened to. I would reach out to the people that were anti-zoning and give confirmation to their opinions. I was concerned I would somehow be lumped in with the pro-zoning people because of my background. I facilitated them in that initial meeting to have a whole other focus. I had to remind the committee again and again, this is not a debate on zoning—especially the media, which seemed to want a more controversial process. This was a community visioning process, an opportunity to educate ourselves about master plans, zoning and visioning. I was even sensitive to how I would dress or that if I was putting something on a flipchart, I would be sitting. I always sat with everybody. We always conducted committee meetings in a circle. We did things in as democratic a setting as we could, which was really important. I had handouts that were generic and that would cover both pro and con positions. I think these strategies were important for me to remaining effective, so that nobody felt that I was taking a position. I would say I had to work harder at convincing the people that were anti zoning of my lack of bias. The people that were pro zoning felt

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they didn't have any problem with how I handled myself.

I hoped if people understood what I was doing and my extra efforts, they would also take the lead. I talked about that with them repeatedly. It happened in press releases that would go out, or letters to the editor, or interactions in how we assigned jobs. I communicated with a couple of people from the pro zoning side, with the person who's a board member and the town councilman who I worked with in the past. I let them understand that I was making an extra effort to reach out to the anti zoning group.

We had the initial meeting in early February. The committee needed to make a presentation and to get the approval of the town board and the town supervisor because they had originally charged this committee with doing the pro or con zoning process and the committee came back with this other initiative. I summarized that first meeting in writing and then circulated it back to the committee people. That's what they used as a template for what they presented to the town supervisor. People had the opportunity to object to anything in my summary before they presented it to the town council. It was a quick turnover. The following week they presented it to the town council and town supervisor who gave the approval to move ahead. We had another meeting on the 21st of February where we reviewed the specifics for holding a series of three educational meetings in March. The idea to have the educational sessions came out of that initial meeting. The goals of pursuing a community visioning process were also established and action steps were developed to begin to accomplish it, included a speaker series. They also decided to do a community survey, and to have the videotape by Ed McMahon available to the community at the town library.

I'll be honest with you, there was no proscribed game plan. Extension's role was to make sure that the committee stayed on task and understood what needed to be accomplished. Specific goals were developed with specific steps that were going to be done that everybody had to feel comfortable about. I've seen so many of these meetings digress into debates and you go into debate after debate, week after week, and nothing gets accomplished. What was important was to focus on specific actions that they could do once they decided what their goals were.

I think they recognized how important my role was in keeping things moving. I never would have gone into that first meeting saying, "I'm really not sure what I'm going to do here." The process is going to depend on what kind of atmosphere and environment I can create—what people come away with collectively. It could have been much different at the end of that meeting if they decided they wanted to go in a certain direction, like a debate. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

For some reason they were receptive because they saw everybody having a say

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in the process that I was proposing. Then everybody got down to task. We had things to do. Everybody was given a specific responsibility. I ended up contacting David Church, director of the NY Planning Federation. He agreed to give a presentation. We had somebody called Ms. LaGrasse who was from the anti zone activist group up in the Adirondacks. The anti zoning people wanted this woman to be able to give a presentation. Everybody said fine, that wasn't a problem. I contacted her; she would not come down if she wasn't going to get money or if she was going to be on a slate with David Church. The people that were anti zoning said, "If she's not going to do it, she's not going to do it." That might have created some angst because they felt that their perspective wasn't going to be there.

In some of the public sessions, the anti zoning group ended up bringing in people from outside of the community who were plants in the audience. I wouldn't say that they were troublemakers but they were specifically there to challenge whatever perspective was put forward. David Church gave an excellent summary, reiterating what I had said of master plans, zoning and community value. He said that in certain situations zoning is a bad idea. He confirmed a lot of the things that some of the anti zoning people had. Zoning is only a tool and tools can be used appropriately and inappropriately. It went very well. He gave a presentation for about 40 minutes. I decided to not allow people to get up and individually ask a question. They were required to write it down for a public record. This was one of the ground rules established to prevent someone from monopolizing the event. I had been to other public meetings where people stand up and you can't get them to sit down. Also if someone doesn't feel comfortable standing up, it can be very intimidating. So writing questions down, then handing them in, really helped. I read the questions word for word to David and circulated through the audience as he was giving his response.

These public meetings were held at the Cairo Elementary School, which was nice and neutral. The Cairo Task Force is a community organization that doesn't have political positions but they help in community events. They provided all the refreshments. There was a table with information from the NYS Planning Federation and anti zoning flyers. We said, "You can put anything you want on this table, this is the open table for anybody's perspective." We also had a sign up sheet for volunteers. We got somewhere between 15 and 20 volunteers through the course of these public meetings to then access further along the process, which we ended up doing.

The following week was another presentation. We had a lawyer named Andy Brick, from a community that's in Albany County 20 miles away, agree to come in and talk as a volunteer. He was involved in zoning and master plan issues from a

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legal perspective. This was serendipitous because he had been reading about this process and the conflict in the town of Cairo and said, “I have some expertise.” He did not take positions, but was generic. He answered specific questions that involved zoning on a technical level so that people understood how it would play out and gave some good and bad examples. He told us that ultimately the decision and implementation of zoning is at the discretion of elected representatives, the town councilmen and planning board regardless of community input. “If they decide they want to do something, that’s what they’re going to do. Ultimately your power is to vote people out if you don’t like what they’re doing.” Andy Turner facilitated the showing the Ed McMahon tape. Then the new director of the Greene County

planning came in and gave an overview of how he saw the situation and would help move the process forward.

I think this community, the town councilmen and people, are in a better position now to know how to do this themselves. They know the process you have to go through. Extension is looking to market this process as a skill, as a service we can provide, so we invested a lot in this.

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Nobody in the committee felt comfortable relaying what was going on and what needed to be communicated. So, much of my time was spent making contacts with speakers. It wasn’t just calling the people, but advertising who’s going to do this and who’s going to do that, and making sure there were posters and flyers. There were ways to get people who didn’t feel comfortable doing facilitation or organizing engaged in a process. Some feel comfortable making sure that food was going to be there and that the posters were put up. These made them feel meaningful and important though they didn’t know how to go through other parts of the process.

I was in a sense managing the process, making sure that somebody was taking responsibility for the things that needed to happen. I would ask, “How’s advertising? Has anybody contacted the Cairo task force for food? How about projectors and AV equipment? Who’s going to take care of that? Who’s going to make sure that there’s a sign up sheet for volunteers?” I wasn’t going to do that because it is something they needed to do, to be part of it, and make sure that it got done. At that point I started to circulate community survey examples from Greene County and other people. How do you do a community survey? As they were going through

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the community survey process, they had information to review. They had already talked about doing a survey after they had brought the community up to a certain level of information.

The committee decided they would go through a process first, before they tried to figure out how people felt about the issues. I was surprised that the town supervisor specifically targeted people that were most polarized for these issues. The initial idea was to educate the community so they could meaningfully participate in the survey. We broadened the scope by following their guidelines. It wasn't just zoning. It was master plan and community visioning in general. Where do you want to be? Then figure out how to accomplish it.

The committee then went through the process of developing a survey. I was facilitating the discussion about what they liked or didn't like. They morphed a number of surveys together and came up with a six-page survey. I encouraged them to make it smaller, but everybody wanted to include something. Everybody had a copy and opportunities to make any changes that they wanted. We went through every single question. The survey was unanimously approved. One of our board of directors drafted it. Then we went back to the town council and supervisor, presented the survey to them and asked for funds to have it printed and mailed out. They signed off to have 5000 copies printed.

The volunteers that had signed up at those initial meetings were mobilized. The town provided labels of the taxpayers from their property tax addresses, then we cross-referenced them with the voters' registration list for duplicates. The target audience for the survey would include registered voters and landowner taxpayers in the town of Cairo.

I helped coordinate volunteers. Instead of us doing it, we always have a volunteer list out there. It is our Cooperative Extension modis operandi. I think we almost do it second nature. It is knowing, subconsciously, that it's building the process. The evening meetings were sometimes just stuffing envelopes. I was trying to be supportive of the process, not necessarily just representing Cooperative Extension. The volunteers were all kinds of people, young and old, and it was powerful to have people from different walks of life. They did the folding, stuffing and stamping. It

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would have cost at least \$20,000 if they had to contract this with a business. I wish I had had a tape of these people in the room. It became a real, I hate to use the word, bonding. But it really did. People became connected sitting there for hours at a time going nuts, cross-referencing, laughing about pronunciations of names and stuffing things in envelopes. It was something that builds a sense of real active community participation. There were more people to make sure things got out in the media. They didn't always print them but it was important for people to know each step of the way.

We mailed out the survey in June. The return date was July 12. They wanted to have it all done by a certain date and I said, don't compromise your process by some artificial date. If it's not where it is, then it's not where it is. Just keep moving along. We sent out approximately 4000 surveys. A number of them came back because of glitches in how they registered voters. We erred on the side of inclusion and not exclusion. The people did not get an addressed stamped envelope to send it back. They had to either bring it to the town building or mail it in. 630 surveys were returned within a two-week period of time. By the time the survey was done, the committee was really empowered. They were the ones in charge encouraging the town councilmen. One councilman was very proactive, and even though he sometimes felt a little intimidated, he wasn't afraid of moving forward. Many of them were intimidated by the town supervisor, who is a lawyer. Sometimes people feel that if don't have some type of expertise and that prevents them from challenging somebody.

I was informed that the committee was asked to meet before the town supervisor. I couldn't make that meeting. There were rumors that something was up. The committee was brought together and the town supervisor thanked the committee for their input and disbanded the committee. The town council would now take over the job of analyzing and summarizing the surveys. It caused tremendous anger, anxiety and distrust in the committee because so many people had been involved in the process. The town council began holding meetings that weren't open to the public. The town councilmen were going through the surveys every night and "analyzing" them.

People had the opportunity to be anonymous or not on the surveys. The supervisor and council had changed their agreement about what would happen to the surveys when they were returned. This was actually a violation of a previous understanding. They said that they wanted to take over, that they were in control. This set up a conflict between the council and the supervisor and the community. We had people out in the community asking the town council and supervisor "What do you mean you're going to take over?" I don't think that the town council felt that

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the committee had the credentials to analyze or understand how it could be used to do long term planning or to create a master plan. One of the committee members tried to infiltrate one of the meetings where they were analyzing the surveys. The committee member walked in and said this is a public meeting I have every right to be here. They stopped the meeting.

At that point some of the anti zoning people on the committee were writing letters to the editor and addressing what was happening. Other newspapers got involved. We knew they were violating some basic civic rules. The committee asked for a copy of the surveys under the Freedom of Information Act and that was going nowhere. The committee was moving to send a letter to the Attorney General. People in the community were saying the same thing. They were not happy with how the town had taken over. We had a lot of different editorials and newspaper articles that talked about what was happening. The town supervisor said blatant things like, "I don't want some jerks looking over my shoulder."

Andy decided to make the town supervisor an offer for Cooperative Extension to summarize the surveys. Other people had suggested CCE's involvement and it had been put repeatedly in letters to the editor. Andy said

something like, "We will also summarize the comments in a code so that there weren't any specific derogatory comments that were going to be public knowledge." The town supervisor agreed. It saved him. Extension did this gratis, without any conditions. We were trying to provide services to our community and wanted a closure. The story demonstrates how, on a number of occasions, Extension's come in and defused potentially big problems. This had gotten to the point where the community was in the process of suing their town supervisor. It would have been a real bad situation. Extension helped to prevent a lot of wasted energy and negative attitudes in our community. The community sees us putting out fires or defusing potential problems. They know how valuable that is.

From a personal perspective, the most challenging part of this project was just trying to stay above the personalities, to stay objective and not to get frustrated with ignorant statements. When people were asking things inappropriately, I try to be diplomatic. I realized that people were passionate about their positions. It's that human element that made it most challenging. This wasn't a group of people who

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collectively wanted to move forward on one issue. In the back of their minds there continues to be this idea, “Are we or are we not going to have zoning.” Now they’re going to be in a much better position to go through a process to determine whether there needs to be some kind of zoning.

What we could have done differently, that would have helped, might have been to specifically spell out who was going to analyze the survey and how that was going to happen. There were situations where some of the people that were anti zoning, after they had opportunity for input, all of a sudden said the survey was too long. A town councilman said the same thing. People forgot the terms of the process. When people felt they were getting valid information that wasn’t in agreement with what they wanted to hear, they scrambled to challenge the credibility of what had happened. Also, certainly, if we get involved again there has to be some kind of budget. But a lot of these committees don’t have money. They’re faced with difficult decisions and they don’t have the money to initiate a process to help them make these decisions. We should do it cost effectively, even wrapping in consultation from Cornell.

The people that took over and actually typed up the survey and did a lot of this stuff were pro-zoning people. Everybody did something. But to be honest, the people that put the posters together or wrote press releases or put the survey together, those are the people that were pro-zoning. So I can understand some possible resentment from the anti zoning people. As it evolved, different tasks were

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adopted by different people. One of the anti zoning people videotaped everything, then edited it and put it in the library. Most people were engaged, but there were a couple of people on the council and the committee that tried to backtrack after it was done. It wasn’t saying what they wanted it to say. Maybe more clarification on the end product would have helped.

The numbers of people that came out to be educated was most rewarding for me and the degree of civility that those meetings had. There were a number of letters to the editor about how civil and informative they were. When it got ugly over what the town supervisor was doing, an opportunity was provided for the community to move forward in some kind of meaningful way and to have Extension be one of the problem solvers. I certainly didn’t want somebody in our community suing the town supervisor. Enough people

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had gotten involved in the effort. The community mobilizes when something like this happens. They were motivated and informed enough about the issue to mobilize and not just to say, “Oh well, its just the way he does it.” They had a specific reason to get involved. It’s important. Rural communities are not making these kinds of decisions in these kinds of ways. Many of them are made inappropriately because they don’t have the resources to make them appropriately.

The lessons I learned had to do with developing criteria for people working on public issues education. Staff has to have a level of trust in the community. When I walked in, I knew a lot of the people there. People know of Extension and I think that that was important. I probably wouldn’t have tried to take on a large public program issue if I hadn’t established a track record. It was also Cornell Cooperative Extension. Having an agenda at the first meeting, that people looked at, was crucial. The whole process requires every meeting to have some kind of agenda. It brings power to the person who is controlling the agenda. It also lets people know that these are the things we’re going to cover. It keeps you on track, but makes sure that you’re open to change. When we were designing a process, some of the people that were participating in it said “They didn’t know what was going to happen.” I would say, “You’re right. You’ve been given a hypothetical situation. You’re creating a design that you think might work. When you get in the middle of it, something might change.” So it’s really staying open and keeping your eyes on the goals that have been established. Steps can shift. If you always have your eye on the goal, then you can remind everybody that this is what we want to accomplish. Stay flexible.

When they disbanded the committee, I felt it was spinning out of control and I’ve got to get out of this. I didn’t know if the supervisor had insisted on control of the surveys. I was concerned people wouldn’t trust the results. I would have been concerned that there would have been a greater polarity than just the issue of zoning. There would have been these issues of local government versus concerned citizens in the community. I would have been concerned that anything that had happened up to that point would have been for nothing because it would have been overrun by this other issue of local government control. I think what Extension

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repeatedly did was to come in and try to help work with a group of people in the community to keep moving forward on an issue. That's why we were brought in initially. This issue wasn't going to be resolved because these people couldn't move forward on it. If the supervisor hadn't done that I know that people would have started lawsuits. I'm positive of that. Then the issue would have been, who's going to win the lawsuit, not what's the information from this survey, what does the community see as their long term vision for where they want to be. We could have never anticipated them doing this; we couldn't have anticipated the reaction of people in the committee. You take the information, ask what can we do to help, provide those options to the people that are involved and hope for the best.

As a facilitator I make sure everybody hears different perspectives. I learned that from watching people's reactions. Education happened within the committee. It didn't go quite as far as I would have liked but people came out looking at each other differently. It is important to stay objective, but I was involved. I had relationships with a lot of these people. For this situation, I thought that it was really, really important to maintain that personal neutrality. I tried to convince people that I was outside of the issue. I was just there to help them accomplish these goals. There was the one time that the one person looked at me and said, "You people with an education, you know what you're doing." The frustration and anger he had is something that I'm sensitive to as a Cooperative Extension educator. This is one of the prejudices we get from people. It is how we talk and present ourselves to people that aren't as educated on certain levels. We can be very intimidating. It reminded me of how that can be alienating to a lot of people, especially in rural communities, because they feel that you diminish their participation and their value by how you present yourself.

People in the process learned that there were ways of working through issues that didn't have to be loud or contentious. People learned that there were more constructive ways and that there are also ways that you can get your community involved in the process. The more people got involved, the better, even getting people the information if they can't make it to a public meeting. People learned that there are ways of using different strategies. There were videos that were available at the library.

My major accomplishments have been getting through the process and achieving the goals. I'm not sure everybody would feel like they got what they wanted out of it, but they did have an opportunity to have input. They saw that communities could move through these issues in a different way. Nobody had done it this way before, so they didn't know how to measure it.


There are a number of metaphors for my role in this process. A coach because

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there was competition. An orchestra conductor because I balanced the different talents that people had. On the other hand, maybe herding, like herding cats, because sometimes it was actually one situation and the next time another. The initial process was nice and detailed. I was mentoring the group. Sometimes I had to take a real strong position. How I became engaged with different people at different times changed. That's the orchestra leader, but it gives the assumption that everybody wanted to make beautiful music, and I don't think that necessarily happened. There were different people going off in different directions and I had to constantly be bringing them back in. Even the community, through editorials, were constantly wrapping them back in so they could stay focused on the goal. First it was getting the information, then providing input on the form of a survey.

The most critical skills were keeping people on track. Even though you think you have a good outline, things break down. You think you're losing control and try to get that control back. I try to always stay calm, making sure that my voice is calm. It makes everybody feels safe, even in a public hearing. The last public hearing, somebody brought in State Troopers because they were concerned there might be conflict. I saw these Troopers and I said I didn't want them inside this meeting, if they wanted to be there they could stay outside. It is important to maintain a calm atmosphere, to be the person in charge that people could depend on and turn to. Things need to move forward. Also at the first meeting people put flyers on windshields, which got a lot of people bent out of shape. So we said to just put them on the table. We said any information could be there.

I learned this through the workshops with Larry Susskind, going through NELD, and when I did the Rocky Mountain Economic Renewal process. Sometimes you go in and you think you've covered all the bases, and it's not working. It is being able to shift and still to accomplish goals. You're there to create an atmosphere and accomplish goals. Sometimes you have to stop and create that safe zone again. In good public issues education, an educator is a networker, convener, facilitator, and coach. You're going to do all of those things at some point, as well as emphasize some over others. Sometimes a facilitator has to be a coach because it's a way of keeping organization without people losing sight of what they need to do. It has to involve everybody too. Every Extension association should



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help their staff understand the value of these skills and the identities that educators can have. I have content expertise, but suddenly you enter into emotions and feelings and it can all break down. We see this in all of the areas that we deal with and want to prepare for it.

Extension has expertise in content areas. We also can connect with people on campus who provide us with information and knowledge. But there are times when

**People can get information in many places, but putting it together and making it viable within communities is an important role for Extension.**

knowledge is not enough. Communities and individuals need help to move forward with that knowledge despite disagreements about its application. That's when people start talking about leadership development. Ideally, we should all have a piece of the leadership. Some people will run with it more and be comfortable within specific areas. Our communities are changing so

quickly, in so many directions, that the issues become increasingly complex. People can get information in many places, but putting it together and making it viable within communities is an important role for Extension. We're working with communities, so this needs to be part of what every educator has in their toolbox. It comes up in every area that we deal with, in our County Youth Fair, our parenting workshops, our nutrition education, and in discussions with farmers and business. This was a civic issue that people didn't feel they could move forward. For this reason, our learning center not only provides information, but it is available for people involved in policy. I've seen it work on a number of levels within my own community

Sometimes I am anxious that people don't understand this kind of work. My concern is that in this environment of having to make fiscal decisions, something like this isn't really concrete and it never will be because it's a process. It's an investment that you make for people to prioritize or be aware of what they could do in their community. I'm afraid that it will be lost, though we'll continue to do it. There's no question we're going to do it in Greene County because it's part of our culture now. But I would be concerned that I didn't have support on campus. It would be nice for other people to say, Extension has been involved. We can provide a kind of expertise of building different skills on a regional level; potentially Mick could do it in agriculture. Somebody else could do it with youth development issues. We could have teams of people on a regional basis that could come in and really specialize in these areas. But if it's not something that's supported by the

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bigger system, then it's not going to go anywhere. If it doesn't become established then we're going to lose it.

Andy and the rest of the staff are going out and continue to stay engaged. I continue to fit in where I can. There's no question that being a facilitator is something that, as I continue to do it, I feel more and more comfortable with. I even incorporate it into my own personal life.

When Andy submitted our budget to the county legislators, we had two goals for Extension in Greene County. One was building stronger, healthier families and communities and the other was enhancing and preserving the agriculture and natural resources of Greene County. I am looking for opportunities to keep getting money coming in so I can keep our organization afloat. We are asking for a significant increase of our budget. It will be interesting to see how it will be received. We're asking for what we need. We see a new opportunity and I think our other funders will see value in our efforts and direction. I am looking forward to getting some funding for this learning center, following through on the things that are already on my plate and staying involved where the opportunities present themselves.

# profile

## Ken Schlather

*Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County*

I am the Executive Director of Tompkins County Cooperative Extension, and I have served in that capacity since September 2003. I came to Extension in a circuitous way.

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Scott Peters**

**March, 2006**

Almost everything that I have ever done in my life, I have done following my gut as opposed to following my head, including coming to Extension. I had been working internationally for about 20 years. Since the time I finished the course work and the actual research for my Ph.D in 1994, I had been thinking that eventually I would like to come back to the U.S. and work in upstate New York. I came to know over time that I wanted to work with a non-partisan organization. I wanted to work in economic development, and I wanted to work with an organization that really focused on strengthening individuals and communities, because I was interested in building democracy at a local level.

Along with other people, I spent several years working on rural development program evaluations in different parts of Central and South America. A group of us exchanged notes, and thought it would be interesting to look at what it was that we found to be the basic components, the basic ingredients, of successful rural development projects. The things that kept coming up again and again in all of our reports of those successful projects were that local people had taken control of their situation. They had identified the priority issues. They had set their priorities in



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terms of what they wanted to work on. They were the ones who came up with the ways that they were going to address issues. They may have had help in doing that, but essentially the ways they addressed issues were their own solutions based on their experience and their knowledge of situations. Therefore they bought into the solutions.

There was also a literal buying in. Although it wasn't necessarily always the case, the initiatives that tended to be more successful were the ones where there was money on the table coming from a local institution, like a local government, a church, a tribe or some sort of entity that these people belonged to or had some connection to. Then, they were drawing on outside resources on their terms. Those resources were either knowledge or money or other in-kind things. Those things were basically brought in on the terms of the people who were running the show, which to me, in a nutshell, describes Cooperative Extension. As I looked more and more closely at what I might want to do, it just seemed so natural that I would move and take a job with Cooperative Extension. I originally figured that I would take a job in something that was related to agriculture, since my field of study is crop science, soil science, and horticulture. I'm not quite sure when the transition came to thinking about applying for an Executive Director position.

**I wanted to work in economic development, and I wanted to work with an organization that really focused on strengthening individuals and communities, because I was interested in building democracy at a local level.**

I grew up in Elyria Ohio, a small town in Lorain County outside of Cleveland, Ohio. The Ohio Extension Service is in Lorain County, and I think the first name of the Extension agent there was Jerry. I can't remember his last name but that tells you something that I remembered his first name. My father probably called Cooperative Extension once or twice since he was raising a lot of apples, although not for a living. I remember where the office was but it wasn't an organization that I really gravitated towards then. In fact, I was growing vegetables organically back in the 1960's, when probably Cooperative Extension wasn't the strongest proponent of organic agriculture. There was kind of a push-pull relationship there. I actually did work for the Utah State Cooperative Extension Service in a soils lab when I finished my undergraduate degree. I was offered continuing work there but I turned it down.

I really had no desire to work for Cooperative Extension. I think it was be-

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cause of the name. It just didn't seem like something that I was particularly interested in. It seemed somewhat boring. It wasn't something that I thought I would want to do. That's really basically out of ignorance. The name doesn't tell you anything for most people. There was nothing about it that seemed exciting to me when I left college.

I went to college as an undergraduate at Utah State. I never really knew what I had majored in until I graduated. I thought I had finished a single degree in something related to plant science, and it turned out that it was a double major, something related to plant science and horticulture. I was never really into school.

I finished my undergraduate degree, left Utah, and came back to Ithaca. I was here in Tompkins County farming back in the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. My brother went to law school at Cornell, so I visited here sometimes. In high school, I would come here on occasion during the summers to spend time. I had another brother here who was interested in starting up a roadside stand as a market, a truck farming thing. So I committed to doing that, and at the same time when I was finishing up college, I had applied to the Peace Corps. I wasn't planning on it but it was something that I had thought of even back when I was in fifth and sixth grade. I was accepted into a program, but I couldn't take it because I had made this commitment to come back to Ithaca, or outside of Ithaca, and farm. So, I farmed here for two summers, or almost two summers, and then I joined the Peace Corps and went to Asia. I was in Asia for eight years before coming back here for graduate school at Cornell.

I had vowed when I was here farming that I would never go to school at Cornell. I didn't go as far as saying I would never work for Cooperative Extension. I said that I am never going to Cornell, because the people there were stuck up and had a tremendous amount of arrogance. I wasn't particularly interested in coming here to go to school, because I was associating with people of the town and there was this obvious love/hate relationship with Cornell.

But I did end up going to graduate school at Cornell. When I was in the Philippines, I met a Cornell graduate from the Education Department, who did a Ph.D. in Education. He was Indian, from Goa. He was just raving about Cornell. Eventually I started working for him in the Philippines. Our deal was that he would help me get into Cornell, if I would basically work with him for slave labor wages. That's eventually what happened. In fact, Cornell was the only graduate school I applied to because I knew even before I met him that I had changed my mind about Cornell. I appreciated and was particularly interested in being able to use Cornell's library. Being out in the middle of the villages in Asia, where you had access to no information, really caused me to appreciate the library. Just thinking about the

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library, Mann Library, was absolutely incredible. It's a huge resource.

I started my graduate study in spring semester of 1989. I did my Masters with Jane Mt. Pleasant, who at the time was an untenured professor in the Soil, Crop and Atmospheric Sciences Department. And then, I went straight on, and did my Ph.D. with John Duxbury in Soil Science. I had done all my coursework for my Ph.D. before I finished my Masters thesis. I finished my Masters thesis and literally the day I turned it in, I was on the plane for Costa Rica to do my Ph.D. research. That was in 1991, maybe 1992. I finished my research in 1994. I was doing research for two years down in Costa Rica. I came back here and worked with a group of graduate students who started up a program called the Mulch Based Agriculture Program. I spent a lot of time working with that particular program and was writing my dissertation on the side. I finished the dissertation, or most of it, by 1996, though I don't think I officially graduated until 1998.

All the time that I was working on my dissertation, I was still back in Central America. I came up here, stayed about a year, a little less than a year, and then I was back down in Central America again. I continued my research in Central America on soils and nutrient cycling. I did a post doc in nutrient cycling. Then I worked in different parts of Central and South America with different universities as part of this Mulch Based Agriculture Program. In 1998, the year that Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras, I basically went there and volunteered. Eventually I began working there in disaster response, which involved post-hurricane rehabilitation of damaged areas. That grew into work in disaster planning with local governments and local people: planning for disasters and post-disaster responses.

I moved from there into work with FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) on a fairly large program around food security in Central America across four countries. I worked with local organizations and national governments to develop national-level policies aimed at improving food security that were grounded in local experience.

In the meantime, my wife and I had kept a house here. So it was here whenever we came back from Central America. Throughout the 1990s, the mid 1990s on, I was thinking some day when I decide to finish my work overseas, I'll come back to Ithaca and central New York and work in development. It was in 2002 that I actually began to think seriously about working here. So, I began to look at jobs in the Cooperative Extension system and in other places, just keeping an eye out for jobs, and one turned up in Tompkins County.

The interview for the job was interesting on a whole bunch of different levels. I mean I was in the middle of some pretty intense work in Nicaragua, working with people at the national level, as well as local people, World Bank people, and others.

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I was also speaking a different language, not using English much, so my English felt a little rusty. I came up here, got off the plane, and literally the next day I was in an interview for the position. In some respects it was like applying for a job in a different culture. I've done a lot of different jobs in a lot of different places, and I've interviewed for many different things, so it was just another interview for a job that I really wanted.

In the course of the interview, I sensed that Tompkins County Cooperative Extension was in a good place. I didn't sense there was need for change within the organization. The Association has, and has had, a very good reputation. In fact,

**My view of Cooperative Extension is that there's a design. The design is what's so powerful about the system.**

when I talked to people from other parts of the state they would say, "Oh there's Cooperative Extension and then there's Tompkins County Cooperative Extension." When they say that, they mean that things were done, lots of times, differently here, that we had a lot of programs that weren't tra-

ditional or conventional programs for Cooperative Extension, whether in 4-H, agriculture, or other areas. The staff enjoyed a very good reputation for being innovative. They had a really good reputation here in the county. Before I interviewed for the job, I talked to a lot of people in the county who I thought would be potential partners if they weren't already partners with Cooperative Extension, to see what their perceptions were of the organization. I talked to people to find out what Cooperative Extension's reputation was, but more importantly, I wanted to find out whether people would have an interest in working with Extension.

My view of Cooperative Extension is that there's a design. The design is what's so powerful about the system. It recognizes and incorporates into its work the same principles that we found so important elsewhere. It was for me a very powerful piece that those are basically built by design into the Cooperative Extension system. Those principles include local control, local people setting their own priorities, local people designing the solutions or the responses to the issues that they have identified, local people putting their own resources on the table, and then drawing on the knowledge from universities or from people who aren't necessarily part of that particular community. These principles are in the design of the Cooperative Extension System. I didn't expect people outside of Cooperative Extension to understand those things, but it was important to me that there at least be some actors here in the community who would have an interest in working with Cooperative Extension.

So, the reputation of Tompkins County Cooperative Extension was good. They

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had a reputation for good solid programs and for being innovative. People spoke very highly of Cooperative Extension in the community. In this sense, the organization was in very good shape. The only crisis was something that wasn't there when I was interviewing, but it was there a month later. It was the threat from the county to cut the funding by as much as 50 to 100 percent. I volunteered here for two weeks before I actually took the job to work just on that particular issue. I focused on beginning to develop a defense strategy, if you will, for how to go about convincing the legislature that they really didn't want to cut Cooperative Extension. The budget from the county for the Association was about \$580,000, which was about 20 percent, of the total operating budget. There were about 55 staff at that time.

The county was faced with a 46 percent tax increase. They told their departments to look at something like a 10–15 percent across the board cut and determine what that would mean. They asked the agencies that were not county agencies but that were funded by the county to develop scenarios based on 50 and 100 percent cuts in county funding. For Cooperative Extension, the 100 percent cut meant, this was our joke, we'll just hand them the keys to the place and tell them to keep on paying the mortgage. We'd have to close. We could withstand a 50 percent cut, but it would have been extremely difficult.

In response to this situation, we decided to be as transparent as possible about how we spent county money. There was a lot of value that Cooperative Extension was producing that wasn't recognized. I thought of the kinds of value that we were producing in three ways. We saved money for the county government in terms of their own budget by reducing expenses for things that they would have spent money on or we added to their county budget bottom line by increasing sales tax in certain areas. We have a positive impact on the county economy that can be measured in terms of jobs in the sectors we work in, say in agriculture and horticulture, and in terms of jobs that we create ourselves. Third, we have a huge impact on all the things that people call quality of life. It's called quality of life because it's very difficult to measure. As soon as it's able to be measured, people move it out of

**We have a huge impact on all the things that people call quality of life. It's called quality of life because it's very difficult to measure. As soon as it's able to be measured, people move it out of the quality of life column and into the economic development column.**

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the quality of life column and into the economic development column. So we looked at those three things, and we developed clear numbers, program by program, that were conservative. The idea was, if anybody looked at the numbers and thought that they were wrong, they would think they were wrong because they were too low, not too high. Therefore, if somebody knew something about a particular topic, and was looking at the numbers, they saw that we were actually very low. Then our credibility with them would be enhanced when they looked at any other number on our table. So we kept numbers low. We also showed people exactly how we got the numbers using a lot of footnotes. It was done so that the numbers were all on one page. We used a column or a table that was not unattractive. We backed up all that data with footnotes that were organized in such a way that it was easy for people to find the information they wanted to.

We had a column for quality of life, and we talked about what a particular program was doing in terms of quality of life. We explained overall that quality of life involved situations where there is economic value, but it's extremely difficult to measure and people could look at it for what it was worth. They could say there's some value to it, or they could say there wasn't. An example of a quality of life factor is an attractive environment to live in. Cooperative Extension runs a community beautification program that is a basis for tourism, it stimulates sales of vegetables or flowers for the local horticulture industry, and it also creates a better place for people to live. That's the quality of life issue. I'm sure there's economic value there but it's difficult to measure.

We also had a fourth category, and we presented it more or less as "people vote with their feet." If we're getting a lot of people coming to our programs and we're getting a lot of people volunteering with us, that's a huge sign that people value what it is that we're doing. In our case in Tompkins County, the numbers are very large. We have almost 30 percent of the population participating in our programs. To be able to say that is pretty huge, and then to be able to point out how many volunteers we have, around 2,000 people. We had numbers to back it up. 2,000 volunteers and the total amount of effort that they were putting in was about 70,000 hours a year, the equivalent of about 35 people working full time. Being able to go in and say those things to the county was powerful. We knew some people were "numbers people," and we also knew other people were "stories people," so we had both, numbers and stories.

We were funded, without a cut, and that outcome was in large part due to the presentation. Four different legislators said ours was the best presentation of any agency that they had ever seen. They said they felt, as a result of the presentations, that this was the first time that they had a good sense of what it was that Coopera-

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tive Extension was doing here.

There are five main program areas that we work in: agriculture and the environment; 4-H youth development; consumer and financial management education; nutrition and family; and community development. The programs include very traditional things that people think of when they think of Cooperative Extension, like 4-H with animals and work with commercial farmers. But we also do work with green building, education on renewable energy and other energy use alternatives, and local foods promotion. There's a whole network now that's been built up by Monica Roth called the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, which is a combination of chefs and producers of local high quality produce that the chefs use in their restaurants to promote the cuisine of the Finger Lakes region.

We also do lead and radon issues and youth tobacco abuse education. In each of the middle schools in the towns, we have program managers who are there for after-school programs with rural and at risk youth. We have a similar program in the urban area of the county, and we have just started one at a mobile home park, which was organized and started by a student from Cornell with support from us. There's also the youth community action program, which was originally set up over in Buffalo. Now we're doing some of that programming here. The program involves providing youth a stronger voice by having them analyze situations that concern them locally and begin addressing those same issues for themselves. And then we have a set of energy programs including a rather large program started by Ann Gifford. She has taken some of the work that she had been doing on energy efficiency and has turned that into a statewide program, with two-hour workshops that are done now in 33 different counties in the state. So, we're working on energy efficiency here at the local level, and she's managing this programming at the state level.

You can see that there is really quite a range of programs here, and the funding comes from a variety of sources. A little more than 20 percent of the funding comes from the county through their appropriation, and roughly an equivalent amount comes from the county for other things that we do on contract with them. About 35–40 percent of our funding comes from outside the county from non-federal and non-state sources, and we have some state and federal funding as well. The federal funding is quite small, and the state funds support programs that provide clear benefits to local constituents.

In addition to our on-going programming, we have been involved recently in initiating a new program focused on energy issues. That's the program I want to talk about.

With the hurricane and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, energy prices were

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skyrocketing. In August of last year, people who have interactions with Catholic Charities were buying heating oil or were trying to buy heating oil, and were just freaking out because of the price. They got in touch with Catholic Charities, and Catholic Charities got in touch with some other agencies here locally. A group of us decided it would be useful to see what we could do together to address the high cost of heating oil, which looked like a really important issue for a lot of people in the county in the winter of 2005–2006. It looked like it was going to be a choice between heating and eating for a lot of people, and it has been. It has been a choice between heating and eating because people just didn't have the high costs in their budgets.

Back in October 2005, natural gas prices were about 80 percent higher than they were the year before. Oil prices were 60 percent higher for the same period of time, and propane was just about the same. If you were going to try to do any kind of energy efficiency work where you would hire a contractor, there was no way you could do it, because every contractor was going full bore and could not take new customers. This was going to affect poor people. It was also going to affect the people in the middle and the upper middle classes for that matter because we were talking about a 50–60 percent increase in the cost for heat in the winter. In terms of an economic hit for the county, it would have been huge. It would have been around a 50 percent increase, maybe \$15–20 million additional cost of money being sent out of the county.

There were about eight organizations involved in developing a response to this situation: the Department of Social Services of the county government; the County Office for the Aging, which is another county government agency; Catholic Charities; Tompkins Community Action, which is the local CAP (Community Action Program) agency; Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County; and Neighborhood Legal Services. These groups were brought together by the Human Services Coalition, which is a consortium promoted or initiated by the county government 30 years ago to have county non-profit and human service agencies coordinate and work closely with each other. The Coalition convened the first set of meetings. Cooperative Extension brought to the table our strong, expert background in education and a pretty good knowledge of the issues around energy and energy efficiency.

We decided there were three basic things that we could do. First, we could identify all the resources that existed in the county that people could use for emergency assistance around heating, like HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program), and other energy programs. We could organize this information in such a way that it would be easy for people to see what they qualified for, who was providing it, and

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how to reach the providers. Then we could get this information into the hands of people who would need it. The second thing was to subsidize the fuel costs that people were going to be incurring. If you could get the people who need it to reduce their other household costs, that would free up more money to buy fuel oil and natural gas. So we looked at work we had been doing previously for the same group, through programs that that put money in people's pockets for things like health, dental care, childcare, food, and so on. Our idea was to find those resources that people could use to subsidize their other household costs, so they could shift money over to pay for energy. The third thing we could do was to help people reduce energy consumption, which would clearly benefit them. We couldn't do anything about the fact that there weren't any contractors available, but what we could do was identify low-cost and no-cost things that people could do to reduce their energy bill. We came up with a list of eighteen things, and began to think about how we could get this out to people.

**Because of my background in disaster management and disaster response, we thought this situation was just a huge opportunity for really helping people to grow together, to unite together around a common theme, a common issue.**

We were also interested in two other things. Because of my background in disaster management and disaster response, we thought this situation was just a huge opportunity for really helping people to grow together, to unite together around a common theme, a common issue. Through working on that issue, they could begin to develop and strengthen their own networks in their communities and their own leadership skills. Then we, or any other community-based group, could work with them in other ways in the future. We were talking about anybody who would step up to the plate in their own community who wanted to work on this issue: communities of place, communities of interest, communities of space, communities of any type. The idea was, let's look for people within those specific communities who have an interest in this particular kind of situation, both for themselves and for other members of their community.

The other piece of interest to us at Cooperative Extension was this opportunity to lay the groundwork for a much larger effort in energy efficiency. In New York State there are lots of programs and money available for people to invest in energy efficiency for their home. If you're a low-income person in New York State, you can get about 70 percent of your investment costs subsidized through NYSERDA

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(the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority) and other related programs, but relatively few people are actually taking advantage of them. Last summer, our association did a survey on the use of these programs in collaboration with Cornell faculty member Bill Trochim, who does concept mapping, and one of his students. We surveyed 240 households in four low to moderate-income neighborhoods in Tompkins, Tioga and Broome counties. We were trying to understand the barriers that people face to adopting and taking advantage of these energy efficiency programs. What we found was that people were afraid and confused. People needed to trust the sources of information. They needed the ability to go back and talk to knowledgeable people more than just once, to help them think things through and come to a decision about whether to make that type of investment.

We looked at this situation and thought if we could put information about these low-cost, energy efficiency programs out in the newspapers and bulletins all over the place, a lot of people would make use of it. Those who did would benefit greatly. But we also had a couple of concerns. If all we did was put information out, we would have missed an opportunity for strengthening networks, and we would have blown an opportunity for laying the groundwork for a large scale, post-emer-

gency energy efficiency program. We figured, though, that we could design something to allow for interaction between people. We would build into it the ability for us to capture names, addresses, and levels of interest of people throughout the county. We thought we could capture levels of interest in energy efficiency as well as interest in helping people in their community. We thought we could address all three of those things at once: to save a bunch of money, trace and strengthen existing networks, and lay the groundwork for future energy efficiency.

**Through working on that issue, they could begin to develop and strengthen their own networks in their communities and their own leadership skills. Then we, or any other community-based group, could work with them in other ways in the future.**

We designed a survey checklist for people of eighteen things they can do to save money on energy. For example, if you installed five special fluorescent lights in your home, you could save between \$30 and \$50 a year. We did that for eighteen different things. People could just run down the list. We also had call-ins set up so we could determine whether they were already doing it, wanted to do it, would be willing to do it, or needed some help doing it.

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We've gotten this information out in a number of different ways. We've got youth groups that have taken it and had contests among area youth to see how much money people could potentially save in their community. One youth's effort might average savings of \$300 per household or \$4500 across all the households visited. One of the youth groups was able to save around \$34,000. Another way we got the information out was at local fairs, local gatherings, and just talking to people. We had them fill out the checklist. We convinced them this would be a worthwhile thing to do. In all these situations, we had a place for them to indicate on the checklist whether they would be willing to share this information in some way, whether it was at church, at work, or with friends in their neighborhood. They could also check off where they would like to share the information. We did this with senior citizens groups and at the local level by identifying street captains. Street captains are basically volunteers who are known and trusted by the rest of the people on their street. They would be the ones to take the survey around door-to-door, share the information, collect the completed survey form, leave them a copy if they were interested, and then get those surveys back to us.

The Heating Solutions Group decided to try out this approach in Freeville, which is where I'm from, just to see if it would work. The mayor there is interested in building community. We also have another person in Freeville who does consulting work on community building. Either this woman or the mayor also knew a postal worker who was very interested in this kind of work.

So, last October, the four of us literally sat down one Saturday afternoon and designed the process from scratch. Through trial and error, in a little less than two weeks we had identified eighteen street captains and twelve volunteers. We did about 150 surveys in a very short period of time. Our aim in Freeville was to try the process out, learn from it, reflect on it, document it, and then to talk about it more broadly across the county to see if we could get other people interested in doing the same thing. There are five other places that are starting up the same thing in their neighborhoods. In Lansing, there is quite a large initiative that involves three different neighborhoods and four different churches. There's a mobile home park where this is being tried out, and we are continuing to work in Freeville. There's also an effort in Newfield and Caroline. So, again, our aim is to work with people who are interested in doing this locally, refine and learn from the process. Then the plan is to scale up the work to the county level next fall.

The Heating Solutions Group has been working at the county level. We've conceptualized, thought through, and refined everything that has been taking place for all three of the components of the program. All of this has been accomplished through the work of the people involved in the Heating Solutions Group. I came

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up with the process for the third component, which was then refined through input from the rest of the group. It turns out that there was a very similar program going on in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1984 and in Madison, Wisconsin in 1995, so this is nothing new. I happened to find that out because somebody from Tompkins County had participated in the St. Paul program. He brought some additional documentation, which we now have and are incorporating into our project.

We added a component for people who need additional help to do low cost, no cost things. In Freeville we're going back to work with people on what they need to have done. We're also incorporating this component into the work in the other five communities. We've pulled in some people from Cornell who do energy work, and local contractors interested in this process because they see it as a way of building a customer base. They're going to offer a technical training to volunteers in April, then those volunteers are going to go out and do this low cost, no cost work in these people's homes in these communities. By the beginning of May 2006, we hope to have completed this work in these five places. Then the people who have been involved in the process will meet to document what we've done and lay the groundwork for a larger scale effort in the fall.

We're also negotiating with county government, which sees our program as a way to cut costs for low-income families, resulting in less need for their services next winter. They also see this program as groundwork for larger scale energy efficiency with two big benefits for the county. First, for each household that has energy efficiency work done, it's got to spend somewhere about \$6,500 on average. There are about 15,000 households that need work done. If actual expenditures amount to 15,000 households multiplied by \$6,000 per household, that's \$90 million, a lot of money that could support a substantial number of jobs locally. Second, the savings on energy are as high as \$600–700 or more a year from these investments. That's a large amount of money, and that's in addition to the money to be saved from the low-cost, no-cost options we have been sharing through the survey. We have now completed about 1400 surveys, and the average savings is a little under \$300 per household, the low end of our range. If that average held throughout the county, you're talking about \$10 million a year in savings. By the way, we have done all the work on this program with minimal resources. We have relied on volunteers and current staff, and have only spent a few hundred dollars for copies.

There are several things that I think are interesting about this initiative. The implementation cost of the program shows that we can do things with fewer resources than we think, including our own resources and time. This project illustrates ways that we should be working on strategic networking, which is a key component of this work. In every community there already exist a lot of networks,

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and some people belong to more than one. If you tap into the right people you can begin to think in terms of what kinds of networks are there to work with. Through strategic networking, you can save time, get other people to do things that they want to do, and reduce the costs that you're going to have on community projects.

Second, if you know what your long-term goals are, then you can use emergencies, which come up all the time, to help you move towards those goals. Emergencies motivate people to act. It is the difference that gets people to work on a Saturday; it's like night and day. Because of last year's emergency, people were motivated. They wanted to work on the issue. They had to work on it; they felt the need. So they worked on it. It's not the same now. If you're not ready when those emergencies strike, those opportunities are there but they're fleeting. You need to be ready for them.

Another interesting thing is the importance of marketing, and of market and audience analysis. Basic marketing is critical to what we're trying to do. It's putting the message out to audiences, segmenting those audiences in a number of different ways and then thinking in terms of what these different segments need to hear in order to be able to act. We get the information out to them in that way.

Extension played an important role in this effort. The low cost, no cost things were based on work done by other people at Cooperative Extension, and in many cases, the work of NYSERDA. This was work that had been done by researchers who in some cases had connections with Extension. So the information was reliable, factual, tested and valid, not hearsay. Extension gave it more credence. The other thing about Extension is the idea of helping bring organizations or people together by facilitating processes. We help pull the resources together that exist locally to get something done. I didn't convene the group because there was no need for me to convene the group. Somebody else was convening the group. But by being involved in that group, I was able to encourage a much more systematic approach than if Extension hadn't been involved.

**The other thing about Extension is the idea of helping bring organizations or people together by facilitating processes. We help pull the resources together that exist locally to get something done.**

What does this project show us about Extension's mission? I think it shows us that while Extension is a useful place to turn for getting questions answered, it is or can be so much more. Two to three years ago, when we were faced with the budget

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cutbacks, I got literally hundreds of stories from staff. I was giving stories to “stories people” in the legislature, along with numbers for the “numbers people.” What was for me so incredible when I was reading those stories, was that the words people in the stories were using were essentially the same words that I had been hearing from participants in Central America when we were using disasters as a way to build community and local leadership. Words like, “I have more confidence now;” “I feel

like I can do something about this problem;” “I came here to get help on this problem, but I went away with so much more, with the ability to deal with the issues in my life;” and “I learned how to deal with issues.”

**What does this project show us about Extension’s mission? I think it shows us that while Extension is a useful place to turn for getting questions answered, it is or can be so much more.**

People talked about having a greater sense of control over their own lives. They had gained an ability to analyze a problem and deal with it on their own. They came here for an answer, but they left with so much more.

I heard that over and over and over again in these stories. In many ways, Extension is really about people taking control and setting their own priorities. Extension asks, “What are your priorities?”, and then puts it back in their court. It’s about people being able to identify the issues that they’re facing, and then using the resources they have to deal with those issues. It’s about helping them as they sort through the resources and the options they have, then helping them to identify the ones that make the most sense to them.

The Extension story is so rich and so exciting to those who understand how people change and grow. When I think about who we are reaching when we tell our story, the ones who understand it almost intuitively, once they’re shown it, are the teachers, psychologists, priests, ministers, and others who are working with people who struggle to make themselves better or make their situations better. The other thing that I think is so important with respect to Extension is that we have the ability to reach out to large numbers of people. When you start doing the numbers, that starts to multiply the kinds of things we do. There’s a value that grows tremendously just because of the numbers of people we reach and involve.

# profile

## Monika Roth

*Agriculture and Environment Program Leader  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County*

**I** call myself the Agriculture and Environment Program Leader. Cornell calls us Extension Issue Team Leaders. The issue team that I'm leading is the Agriculture and Environ-

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Kim Niewolny**

**June, 2003**

ment Program. I've been working as the agriculture program leader in Tompkins County for about fifteen years, and I've been involved in coordinating the regional team for about six years now.

My responsibilities have really changed over time. When I started I was the only person in the program.

There was no team to lead, but I was hired as the program leader. Now I have people working with me. My team includes about eight people in the Tompkins County office. There are four other educators working within our regional team. So my responsibilities now include working outside of Tompkins County in four other counties.

My current responsibilities are divided into two main areas. One area is managing Tompkins agriculture and environment programs. The other area is the ag-economic development and marketing programming piece which evolved from being a program leader. A lot of program leaders are agriculture generalists covering a wide variety of topics. My job responsibilities within the regional team context are ag-economic development and marketing and a bit of policy education, which is about forty percent of what I do. The other twenty percent is then related to regional team leadership. The remaining forty percent is related to Tompkins County



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ag and environment program leadership and development.

Agriculture is really a large issue area here in Tompkins County. The programs that have evolved over the last twenty years include our horticulture program, which was originally part of my job. Today, it is a self-standing program with its own horticulture program manager. We have an agriculture program manager who is my right hand assistant. We also have a compost program manager and an environmental educator, which is an agent level position. We have a new program educator called the community beautification coordinator. We have staff for the Ithaca's Children's Garden, which includes three people. We also have the secretary for our team. That's the county piece of it.

The regional team is responsible for addressing the needs of the agriculture industry. The county team addresses local issues, like the home gardening program. The regional team is organized so that each of us has a subject area we are responsible for in the five counties that we work in. So across the five counties, we have divided the agriculture subject areas according to the types of producers we have in the region.

I lived on a farm when I was very young. After we moved to this country, we moved to the city. I was born in Austria. My family came to the United States when I was five. I grew up and went to school in Ohio. Basically, I became an American. Most of my relatives are still in Austria and all over Germany. We still go there; we still have close connections.

I grew up in Mansfield, Ohio. It's in the center of the state. I was the first child. I was an independent kid because my parents were immigrants. I learned how to speak English. They could not speak English very well so I was their ambassador. That part probably made it hard for them. After high school, I went to a liberal arts school called Wittenberg University. I focused on a science curriculum. My real inspiration for science was my high school biology teacher, Mr. Poffenbaugh. He still is a mentor. He writes a gardening column in our hometown paper. It's interesting that we still have a common interest. He was much more visual and engaging about his teaching, which is one of the ways you learn more. I also had a good French teacher. Because of good teachers, those were my two options when I went to college. It was basically biology or French. I did study a little French, but decided I could always pursue languages so I stuck with the sciences.

My degree is in biology with a focus in plant science. At some point in college, I realized I was interested in agriculture. I became interested because I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Reading that certainly had an influence. Not that I wanted to go spraying everything. I wanted to understand insects. The thing that stuck out for me in the book was the position of the Extension entomologist. So I thought

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maybe that was what I wanted to do. I didn't know anything about Extension or 4-H. So that connection, knowing that someone can work in agriculture, came from the reference in the book. Of course, the entomologist was the bad guy in that book, but I still thought it was an interesting area. I don't really know why I wanted to be working on insects, its not that I liked them, but I decided to pursue entomology as a possible career.

Once I decided to study agriculture sciences, I took a semester away from Wittenberg. I went to Ohio State my senior year to take a lot of the courses Wittenberg didn't offer, like soil science, entomology and plant pathology. I had maxed out what I could take at Wittenberg because their science degree would lead you to a PhD track, but I wanted pursue applied sciences.

In hindsight, I was pretty directed. I purposely sought science related jobs. I worked at the agriculture experiment Extension station in Wooster, Ohio in the summers during college. I looked for something that related to my inter-

ests. I didn't just go home and work at Burger King. I knew I wanted a job related to science, so I got a job at the experiment station. I had a real great experience working there. That environment is so positive. The benefit of working at an experiment station is the respect that you get from the faculty working there versus on campus. There is a feeling of hierarchy in the university system that you don't get at an experiment station. The lowly technician is valued. You feel like your opinion is listened to. It makes you feel more a part of the whole process. You learn more from that; it's motivating. It was a really good environment to work in. I worked in the entomology department for two summers. Then I transferred over to a USDA Japanese beetle lab and worked another year for them after I completed college. That was also good experience. It was fun, and I learned something. It was a combination of finding the jobs at the experiment station in the summer and taking the courses at Ohio State that kept me on track of wanting to be an entomologist.

After I graduated from college, I continued to work for the USDA Japanese beetle lab, but I was looking for permanent jobs. I wanted to work with some rather famous entomologists at the Geneva experiment station<sup>8</sup>. So I visited Geneva and met with these two guys. I asked if they had any jobs available at the station, and

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<sup>8</sup> New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/>

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found out more about their work. It was an informational interview. They said they didn't have anything there, but they sent me down to Cornell. I didn't know anything about Cornell, so I said "OK." They sent me to interview with a plant pathologist, Otto Schultz, at Cornell who had a job opening, I had the interview, and he hired me.

So I came to Cornell working in plant pathology. I didn't really like plant pathology in college, but I was good at it. I worked in the department for six years doing Extension work. This was the Extension connection. I worked with Extension folks across the state supporting plant diagnostic work for vegetables and field crops. I was their support. For example, if Extension staff came across a disease problem, they would send the plant sample to Cornell. I would then diagnose it and give them the information about what to do about the disease. We also did a lot of field trials with the Extension agents. We would have plots looking at different diseases and how they were controlled by different chemicals. Sometimes we evaluated variety resistance to a disease. It was a typical technician job but my boss gave me a lot of freedom to take on projects. I really liked it; it got me across the state.

We would also do talks at farmer meetings and conferences. I got to the point where I was writing Extension publications and doing the talks at winter meetings. I was not the behind the scenes type of technician. Then my boss got cancer. I was basically running the program during the time he was sick for almost two years. After Otto passed away, I had another boss. But there was a period of time when I was basically 'it' in the field crops area.

I got to know the Extension people around the state and learned about what they did. I decided I wanted to become an Extension agent. Extension was more production oriented then, and since I already had the entomology and plant pathology training, I felt qualified to do the work. These were two strong disciplines I had under my belt. Also, I had experience with: fruit crops, turf from the USDA Japanese beetle work, vegetables, and field crops. So I had developed a solid knowledge of pest problems for both insects and plant diseases on a variety of crops. That made me fairly versatile. Also, having a good science background really helped prepare me for an Extension career.

When I was at Cornell, I started working on a Master's degree in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). I was taking courses that were job related so I thought I might as well just get a degree out of it. Then the agriculture Extension job opened up here in Tompkins County, and I decided to apply for the job. So instead of pursuing the degree in IPM, I got the job.

For the first three or four years of working here, I was providing leadership for the vegetables, fruits, ornamentals, and the home gardening programs. Early on, I

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was a production horticulture Extension educator working with industry. But the farmers said, “We don’t need help with production; we can grow anything. We need help with marketing.” So I started to shift my work towards marketing after the first four years of my job. I decided what the farmers were telling me was what they needed, so I went back to school to get my Master’s degree in agricultural economics at Cornell University. As a result, and also because of the kinds of farmers we have here in the area, I’m probably considered to be a statewide specialist in direct marketing. I have given talks nationally and internationally and am well known for my knowledge of direct farm marketing.

In 1980, when I started with Extension, there was a team of staff working with the dairy and field crops producers. My job as a program leader was to assure that the needs of all producers were being addressed. It is the farm community who establishes the priorities for our programming. The Cooperative Extension team then develops the program plan accordingly. My job is to interact with the county agriculture program committee to facilitate the input process. I need to understand what they feel are the highest priority needs. My team and I would then develop educational programs that would address the needs that were identified. That is my concept of the leadership piece of my job.

It’s about listening. It’s understanding what people’s issues are as well as being able to synthesize all that information. You then have to turn around and develop an educational response, like a program. It is really important to be able to sort through the input I get from the farmers, or whoever else I’m dealing with, to be able to find out what is really behind the

information that they are giving me. A farmer might say, “Taxes are an issue. Our taxes are just too high.” I don’t think that has changed in the last twenty years. The real problem is income on farms. Taxes are just a piece of the cost of doing business. I try to help farmers figure out the pieces they can control. It’s really about listening to individuals at a meeting or in other venues and being able to read between the lines. It’s also about being able to facilitate a program committee meeting and pull out of farmers what some of the issues are and be able to turn around and say, “OK, this sounds like the issue. Maybe this is what we can do about it.”



**It’s about listening. It’s understanding what people’s issues are as well as being able to synthesize all that information. You then have to turn around and develop an educational response, like a program.**

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Program committee meetings were at one time conducted about once a month. We hold them about six times a year now. The challenge to getting good input is good representation and participation on the agriculture program committee. We really need to make sure we get a fair number of folks who can come to the table and be heard. That is something I try to work on. I try to make sure the committee

**The challenge is that we have many stakeholders on our program committee with various interests. The benefit is that they learn from each other and we try to find common interests to work on.**

is comprised of people who truly represent the industry, people who can speak for the industry. Their voices are the ones bringing the information to us about what they think their particular agriculture needs are. That's what it's about. For example, I make sure there are two, three, or four dairy representatives on our program committee because it's the county's largest ag sector. I try to make sure we include a vegetable producer, a livestock producer,

and a nursery and greenhouse businessman or woman. Now we have an expanded committee with even broader interests including environmental and consumer interests.

Stakeholders come together with many different agendas. It was much easier working with a strictly agriculture-based committee because there are more commonalities. It is even easier working with just one commodity, like the dairy producers. The challenge is that we have many stakeholders on our program committee with various interests. The benefit is that they learn from each other and we try to find common interests to work on. The farmers are learning that there is consumer support for agriculture, and the environmentalists are interested in what happens on farms. They are learning that they aren't completely antagonistic. As the program has evolved, we have included more stakeholders. It is a way for everyone involved to learn from each other.

We add new committee members by asking, "Who should be here?" We ask established committee members to suggest new members and programs. Ideas for programs also come from people here at Extension. We ask around to get new input. When we offer a workshop, or arrange a meeting, we get ideas for future programs from attendees. We get of input for programs from one-on-one meetings and from the calls that we get. Programs are developed not just from the committee members' input but from all levels of interaction with our audiences. For example, vegetable producers are always concerned with deer. We always know that deer are

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high on their priority list. I might only have one vegetable producer on my committee, and they might have an opinion to what is important for them. But because I am interacting with vegetable producers in many other venues, I can make sure the opinions that one person is sharing are really valid. I can bring in new opinions, and I can help make the committee aware of other ideas and concerns.

It's about balancing the programs, essentially. It's a process. It's taking note of ideas that we hear, and not letting the little things that are being said escape. It's really important to capture all the ideas I can. I feel that the input process to our programs is really just a matter of not losing information that gets passed onto you. I do that by keeping it in my head, but also by bringing it to the program committee. I share it with my staff saying, "OK, here is what has been brought up as an issue; how might we address this further?"

The plan of work process helps with gathering ideas too. It is about putting as much on the table as one can then being able to sort and prioritize it. The plan of work process is a major effort of identifying issues and organizing them. We do this every four years. We've done a pretty good job of it. This time around, we did a fairly extensive survey of the agriculture industry. The survey was conducted at the county and regional level. Regionally, we mainly worked with the program committee people. Our next step after getting input is to bring the industry people back together, and then ask, "OK, here is the list. Here is what we've sorted out. Are these the right things for you?" We are constantly checking in with people to make sure our programs address relevant needs. Once we have a list of needs, and have identified what our goals are, the next challenge is making sure our programs stay in line with the goals we set. For example, deer are primarily an issue for the vegetable, fruit and ornamentals industries. What can Extension do? How can we help them with this issue? It's really a DEC<sup>9</sup> matter. We need to look at who is already addressing the particular issue. We have to ask, "What is our role?" When we identify an issue, there is this big filtering process. It's second nature to me now. First of all, when someone raises an issue we have to ask, "Is this in the Extension mission?" Some policy issues might be something that Farm Bureau should address. This process helps us focus our programs on what our roles and capabilities are while addressing real concerns of farmers.

**It's a process. It's taking note of ideas that we hear, and not letting the little things that are being said escape.**

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Environmental Conservation: <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/>

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The ag development and marketing program area is unique because it is driven in part by what counties have identified in their agriculture and farmland protection plans. Most counties in the region have an agriculture and farmland protection plan. The group that leads that planning process is an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board. This is separate from our program committee. It's a board of county government. The Agriculture and Farmland Protection plan serves as the basis for ag-economic development. There are many approaches to developing agriculture in a county. There are some regional differences because each county has unique industry characteristics to address. For example, Schuyler County has a strong wine industry; that is a unique characteristic to keep in mind. Chemung has a large commercial horticulture industry. Tioga has a lot of small farms. Cortland has a lot of dairy farms. So each county is unique. My job is to look at the strengths of each county's agriculture sector and build on it. I take a localized approach for community involvement, yet I'm trying to offer programs that meet needs across the regional area. There are some ag development and marketing issues that can be addressed at the regional level and some that are better addressed at the county level. An effective ag and farmland protection board and ag plan enhances the ability of Extension to address agriculture's needs by offering a variety of approaches.

The marketing piece includes supporting farmers' markets to help them flourish. In some communities the markets aren't really a viable outlet for farmers. The other piece is to identify new marketing opportunities for producers. For instance, I've been providing leadership for the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty program (FLCB)<sup>10</sup>. It's about linking local farmers and food producers to area restaurants. Fortunately and unfortunately, the FLCB program has been taking much of my time. It could be a full time job. It would be nice to be able to have someone manage it entirely but we need to find funds for that. Ultimately, it is a program that I hope to spin off from Extension.

The FLCB program is an outgrowth of working with direct marketing. The farmers' markets are an example of direct marketing. FLCB focuses on the connection between local farms and restaurants, and other food establishments. It's about making a more purposeful restaurant and tourism connection for farmers. I've also been exploring ways to get local farm products into Cornell University dining. We already have local foods in farmers' markets and some stores.

The name Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty was something that a chef came up with. The reason we even got together as a group was because two or three years ago we organized a conference on agriculture tourism in this region. At the conference,

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fingerlakesculinarybounty.org/>

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there were different themes. One of the themes was about connecting the food from local farms with hospitality sectors. It was about creating local cuisine, regional cuisine, which is something that has been happening around the country. There are a lot of models to follow including Berkshire Grown and the Vermont Fresh Network. I was exposed to the California work a long time ago. I spent some time out in California, and was very familiar with the farmer-restaurant connection work being done out there.

This local, regional cuisine tourism concept was bubbling up all over the place. The next year, we organized a meeting devoted to regional cuisine. We invited folks from the Vermont Fresh Program to speak. We also invited local chefs that were working with local farmers. The meeting was a way to get people together. After that meeting people really started to get excited about forming a Finger Lakes Farm and Food Network. We had the idea, but we really hadn't made anything happen yet. One of the chefs on the panel, Henry Benveniste, became the spark plug for FLCB. In 1999, we started hosting monthly meetings that included farmers, tourism representatives, restaurant owners, and chefs. Like all start-up organizations, we spent time writing the mission statement. It really was a grassroots kind of thing, and still is. It was just a bunch of people getting together trying to develop a concept and figure out what we really wanted to do with this idea. How could we develop the concept of regional cuisine in the Finger Lakes? It evolved naturally. We invited some people who we knew from the community that were interested in developing a local connection with food and restaurants. It all started as a Cayuga-Tompkins County Extension effort.

As an Extension person, many times you end up taking a leadership position. I think this is because we gain a lot of process skills during training as Extension educators. Also, in many groups, the others are volunteers, like farmers; and don't have the time or supporting infrastructure like we do. I tend to take on leadership roles and will usually step in and assume responsibility. I just started saying, "OK, I will take the notes; I will do what you need to get this going." I have been involved right from the beginning with FLCB. The reality is someone like Henry is a great idea person, but follow through was difficult with his business. He was great. He was the front person marketing the idea of FLCB, but there wasn't any logistical follow

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through. I provided the foundation to keep FLCB moving forward. We started with organizational meetings and invited more people from a broader region, so we could expand the project to the Finger Lakes. I would call them networking meetings. We still have annual networking meetings for chefs and farmers. It's really about them networking to develop business relationships, not for us educators.

Things have developed further. Now we host a trade show every year where farmers and food producers from the Finger Lakes come with their products. Also, chefs and other buyers come. It's growing slowly every year. I think the biggest challenge is working across fourteen counties. It's a big region. Yet it makes sense to work across the Finger Lakes because on a county level, you just don't have that regional identity. The idea is to create that regional identity linking wineries, farms and food establishments. The wineries have been very supportive.

We have now built the program into a large membership organization. The way we built the membership was through networking meetings, the trade shows and conferences. People would fill out forms to sign up to become members of the program offering their support. It's been built up enough to where we have put together an on-line directory of producers and restaurants. We have built up the database over the years, even beyond the membership. The total number of interested supporters and producers comes to about 400. The actual paid members are about 120.

It's been interesting working on FLCB because it has been an easy concept to explain. Everyone gets it. Public response has been positive. The program is still in its infancy though. It needs the next level, which is a business plan. We have a board of directors, but I feel that our board is not functioning well. We don't have by-laws, and we are not an independent non-profit organization. This is the kind of project that Extension needs to spin off. I've been writing the grants for it. We got a \$28,000 grant from NY Agriculture and Markets to conduct a distribution study. We have gotten other little grants that have supported the program too. I will probably write a couple of other big grants that I hope will get us to the point where we can hire staff. My goal is to transition FLCB out of Extension so it can be its own entity. It's a project that should have its own life. It will. It's now about laying the foundation. That is where we as Extension educators can serve a valuable role. We have a chef who is president of the board and another chef is vice president and there are other interests represented on the board. It is a good mix of people, but everyone is really busy. They really are committed to this whole concept, but they need somebody to provide the staff support.

Because this program is such a big effort, I have to balance it with my other responsibilities. I've been able to do it by having some part-time staff that I hire

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with the fees and grants from the program. The Tompkins County Extension secretary keeps the database. Part of what hampers the development of an organization like this is not having staff support. Not that we aren't providing good staff support, but we just can't provide everything that is needed to make it grow. It's getting to the five year mark, so if we can get a business plan together and get a good solid chunk of money, we could become self-sufficient. That's where we are for now. Our goal for the end of the year is to have a business plan set in place. We also want to have some funding so we can hire staff.

One of our efforts is focusing on marketing FLCB to consumers. We need information to make consumers aware of FLCB and to support the idea of local foods. We try to let people know that local, regional food is available year round and to increase consumer demand for local foods. We need more restaurant participation and commitment to buying local. That doesn't seem to be a problem; there are many who are interested. As for the farmers, we are working on the distribution project that will help streamline the process of getting products to restaurants. What we are doing now is faxing a weekly list of available products from farms to the 100 restaurants. The farms provide the information; we fax it to chefs.

Other groups around the state are also addressing ways to improve farmer-buyer connections. We are working with the Finger Lakes Organic Growers Cooperative (FLO)<sup>11</sup>, which has been struggling with distribution as an issue. There is another group called Catskills Family Farms distributing goods to New York City. There is another group called Adirondack Harvest<sup>12</sup>, which is another regional identity program patterned after FLCB. I was working with them on a consulting basis and helped get them started. They have really taken off with their program. I think it is because they are a little more focused on developing a buy-local campaign, not the restaurant piece.

FLCB is an example of a multi-year, major regional effort that takes time to show results. I can't say we haven't had any results. After every trade show I get emails from vendors that say they have x number of new customers from this event. We are not trying to be a broker. We don't have the sales force out there, maybe as an organization down the road, but that's what they need, and that is not our role.

My role in this whole process is to support the effort so we can continue to open doors for the farmers in terms of market opportunities. But we aren't going to hold their hand through it; they also have to take some of the initiative. They have to be a part of the program, getting their product information to us, and doing some

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<sup>11</sup> <http://fingerlakesorganic.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.adirondackharvest.com/>

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of their own face-to-face marketing. We have the printed directory so they can go through it and call these restaurants. We were the ground workers in this whole thing. We need to keep it rolling. I'm tenacious enough that once I start something I'm not going to let it fail. So it will happen. It is already happening in some ways. Having new people involved in the program all the time keeps the energy up.

Another long-term project I'm working on is to try to expand the support system for agriculture. We are trying to identify programs that farmers can use that are already available to other non-farm businesses. I've worked a lot with Cortland

**My role in this whole process is to support the effort so we can continue to open doors for the farmers in terms of market opportunities. But we aren't going to hold their hand through it; they also have to take some of the initiative.**

Industrial Development Agency and they are very supportive of agriculture. They are a resource for all businesses. They provide low interest loans for major expansions. Granted, the kind of projects they would be interested in tends to be the bigger projects, like a big dairy project or a new dairy barn, but there is no reason why other agriculture businesses can't fit into their program parameters. The idea is to open the doors for farmers to work with economic developers. This is something I will have to do county by county

since it's not a regional issue. I need to get them to see that the business infrastructure can serve agriculture. Each county has their own interests and some like Tompkins County may not be interested in serving agribusiness needs, but I am starting to work on changing that.

It's tough. It takes a long time to produce tangible change. We are working to build support for agriculture that down the road will hopefully have some pay off. But now, it's just opening the doors. So agricultural development work, like FLCB, takes a long time before you see the results. It takes tenacity to make sure things really happen for people. I think that's the hardest thing in the big scheme of things. People don't really expect results over night, but what I have learned is that they don't want to wait too long. It takes small steps along the way that lead to the overall goal.

I put a lot of emphasis on helping farmers with grant opportunities. There have been an increasing number of grants available that farmers can apply for themselves. I have done a lot of education to increase farmer awareness of grants. In fact, everyone around the state now refers to the list of grant opportunities for farms that

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I developed. Cornell's Community Food and Agriculture Program (CFAP)<sup>13</sup> and the Small Farm Program<sup>14</sup> are promoting the information on their websites. I felt that the farmers did not know about grant programs they could be taking advantage of. Part of my job is to make sure they are aware of them. There really is a lot of information out there. I think they should be in touch with it to help themselves.

Working through people to make change is not always the work you do directly. It's really about working with people. I'm on several county committees and boards representing agriculture, like the Tompkins County Planning and Advisory Board and the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Board. Extension provides what I call staff support to county government for educational outreach and information on agriculture. In Tompkins County we have to lead the process for the county in developing our agriculture and farmland protection plan. In other counties, agriculture and farmland protection plans are driven by county planning. In this case, here in Tompkins, I felt Extension was in a better position to lead the process and stepped up to the plate. I feel if I hadn't been writing the grants and pushing the planning process along, the plan would not have had such broad agricultural support. You can't be shy; you have to interject yourself and take what I felt was an Extension leadership role, to make sure a plan was done. Now we can continue with the plans. We really worked hard to get the implementation process started. I can't be at every ag and farmland board meeting in the region; but I can be a resource for them. That is what I do in the other counties, especially Tioga. If there isn't a strong person driving the process locally, it doesn't happen. We need to position ourselves as the resource for agriculture information for county government. We do the surveys and analyze the data for county government. We should be seen as the organization that you go to if you need information about agriculture. I think we have done that in Tompkins County.

In some cases we operate in the background. I look at the work I've done over the years with the Ithaca Farmers' Market. They are pretty solid as an organization, but they still rely on me for certain things. I'm the fall back advisor. They know they can get support from me. I keep them informed about grant opportunities. I

**Working through people to make change is not always the work you do directly. It's really about working with people.**

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cfap.org>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu>

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help lead the process in thinking about their future vision. I've also helped them through some difficult board issues. I'm in the background if they need me. They can call on me for major issues. They don't need help with day-to-day issues. Over the years, that's been our Extension role. For instance, when they needed to sign the lease with the City of Ithaca, we helped to make sure they were in touch with the right players. I have dealt with city government before, so I can help them figure out who to talk to and let them know what the procedure will be like. It's that kind of background. We are here to help them succeed. That's how I see it.

I keep saying "we." I'm the program leader. I'm the facilitator to some degree, but I do get input. So I do refer to "we." It's not just my own ideas, it's the collective ideas received from many people that we are implementing. Certainly, a lot of them are my ideas, but I am not comfortable always saying, "I did this; I did that." I really do feel like it's "we." I am the representative of the organization leading the process, and I do get input. Before, when I didn't have staff, obviously, I was leading the process. Now I have staff or committee people. I always have committee people providing input and the reality-check for what we do in our program. They are the group I go to make sure we are working on real issues. The staff each has their defined program area, but within that they have latitude to develop the program as they see fit.

**We often serve the catalyst role for starting new programs and helping them move to another level. That's the role I like to play, getting programs up and going.**

We are often in the background saying, "Here's a possibility we can help facilitate." We bring a lot to the table, but ultimately we have been steering the process because we have been able to get grant money. If we don't have the funding, there is no way we can do it. With grant money there is a lot more ownership involved which means that

more responsibility for the project goes to the community. We often serve the catalyst role for starting new programs and helping them move to another level. That's the role I like to play, getting programs up and going. We started Citizen Pruners<sup>15</sup> and Master Composters<sup>16</sup>. These programs almost have a life of their own. I can stand back now, but I don't completely because I'm still the person who gets the money for these programs. At this point in my career, I'm spending more of my time writing grants and finding new opportunities for funding programs and staff. I'm

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<sup>15</sup> <http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/tompkins/CitizenPruners/index.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/tompkins/compost/mastercomposter.html>

# profile

## Monika Roth

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always on the lookout for a program opportunity that looks like it would be good for the agriculture community. I would really love some of the jobs that I have created for my staff. But I'm part of the work; I'm an advisor to their work. I'm just glad to see the programs serving the purpose we had envisioned. The thing I like the most is the creativity of programming. It's like "come up with an idea and do it!"

I feel like we have so much luxury in Extension to come up with an idea and have the power to implement it. On campus, it seems like you don't have that direct opportunity to be able to come up with an idea and carry it all the way to seeing it actually happen in the community. That is what is so great about Extension. I think that is what makes me good at my job is that I tend to be a creative programmer. I can easily come up with ten ideas on how to address an issue that others may not come up with. I like to feed others' creative ideas. I also look for opportunities and solutions to problems. It is sowing the seed, and getting others to buy in, and then the program gets established. It may take a few years, but it works. You just have to look for opportunities.

**Educators need people skills first. It's important to have the ability to interact with a whole range of people. The next skill is not to make assumptions about people and their ideas.**

I try to stay on top of the new information coming out. I meet with folks at state and national conferences. I am a big part of many local meetings. I have good connections. It's about listening to people and gathering good ideas. Reading helps too. Newsletters are a great source of information. Getting to a few of the national conferences really seems to be a good source of inspiration.

Do I use campus as a resource? If I were in production agriculture I would more, but since I'm not, I don't. I work with Nelson Bills in the Ag Econ Dept at Cornell. I also use the Small Farms Program and CaRDI (Cornell's Community and Rural Development Institute).<sup>17</sup> I connect with the folks at CFAP (Cornell's Community, Food, and Agriculture Program).<sup>18</sup> So those are the programs I do connect with, but I wouldn't call them a big resource. I do more with Nelson because he is a good data cruncher and I'm not, so he is a great resource. But since we all are working under the same sphere, I can bounce ideas off, and I get input. I like to find out if they have heard about a new something or other. It's that kind of a relationship.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.cfap.org>

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Educators need people skills first. It's important to have the ability to interact with a whole range of people. The next skill is not to make assumptions about people and their ideas. Many people come to us, especially in agriculture, with ideas about farming or other projects. Sometimes they may seem wacky, but in reality, you never know who or how someone is going to succeed. It really depends on the person. Often it is their personalities that will make the project succeed. They might have the qualities of a good entrepreneur even if their project idea sounds kind of wacky, or what someone else might perceive as a wacky idea. So it is important to be able to work with a wide variety of people, and to avoid being judgmental about any idea they might have. My role, regardless of what someone comes to me with, is to help them achieve what they want to achieve. This can apply to the home gardener, the farmers, and the volunteers we work with. We try to figure out ways to be able to help them get there.

When you're first out of college, you have all this book knowledge. One thing I have learned is to avoid a textbook response. I notice new staff may tend to jump to a conclusion too quickly without getting enough information. The reality is that you have to ask questions initially. You can't make judgments. You're not the answer person; you're the question person. The idea is to be able to ask the right questions. You can only give the right answers if you know what questions to ask. I think that this is really important. You learn this from making mistakes along the way. When you start out, you think, "OK, I have to have the answer." I learned to ask questions early since I didn't know all the answers, so I would just say, "I will just have to get back to you." You learn a ton because you do the research and figure the question out before you get back to the people. The other thing that I learned early in my career was to get back to

people promptly. I feel a high level of responsibility towards the client or the public. I try to get back to people. Even though these days, I'm not nearly as good as I used to be because I am too busy. I try to promote a customer service attitude among my staff. I make sure that they are getting back to people and not leaving them dangling. Making sure they are giving good service and good information is an important skill.

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Another skill, which is an interesting one, is program planning and needs assessment. I think I learned this through in-service Extension training. The training I had was just invaluable. When I first started, I felt they did a lot more of this. We had regional and statewide training programs on plan of work development that provided me with a really good grounding in planning processes when I first came into the Extension system.

One of the skills I have, more intuitively, is to be able to assess a situation and read between the lines. To be able to take an idea, concept, or issue someone is raising and turn it around into an educational program or a positive response. Just to be perceptive all the time. For example, at a farmers' market board meeting I learned that NY Ag. and Markets was inspecting markets so I realized, I needed to remind farmers about the selling requirements. It's about being able to identify program needs wherever you are. It's using these opportunities to be able to say, "Okay, here is a need. This is something we should be dealing with." You also must be able to really listen to folks. When you first start in Extension, you are just expected to know how to do your job. I think you need to be aggressive enough to search for those creative ideas and to be able to put things together in terms of a program. That takes both initiative and experience.

For many of us in agriculture, we come into the system with a science background. The people who succeed are the ones who are willing to work at the whole community level, not just the microscopic level. In some ways, Extension is the greatest place to keep learning. You are exposed to a variety of opportunities, and you're not confined to only one discipline. Some people are specialists, like a dairy specialist. Yet even in the world of dairy they still have many opportunities. When I left plant pathology and became an Extension educator, the most difficult transition was not having the time to work at an in-depth level. That was a hard transition for me because I felt I was not being thorough in my work. When you work on a research team, you are much more focused and thorough. Some people don't make that transition well. If you really are someone who is over attentive to every single detail, this job would kill you. Then again, there are jobs in Extension that are more focused than mine. You just have to have a ton of flexibility. You have to be able to



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respond to many needs at once and remain flexible about the whole process. You can't be locked into one idea or program. It's good to remain open to new possibilities. But, you just don't want to completely go with the flow; that can eat you alive.

Setting and following priorities when developing a project are key.

**Extension is a grassroots effort. It's more than just that process of, "I have the information you need. I am the teacher and you are the student." It's much more engaged. It is an engaged process. We involve the people to make change.**

So it's about having those process skills down. I think it's about the whole plan of work process. It's a process of gaining input and understanding community needs. I feel like the community comes up with the structure, and I help them to get involved in leading the process. It's not about me saying, "This is how it should be." It's about getting community input and involvement.

Extension is a grassroots effort. It's more than just that process of, "I have

the information you need. I am the teacher and you are the student." It's much more engaged. It is an engaged process. We involve the people to make change. It's much more community based when you involve people for change.

I love working with the farm community and on behalf of the farm community. I do work on their behalf. The other part I love is the opportunity to be creative. All of the programs we do here inspire my creativity. I think about ways to help the people in the community. Sometimes it takes someone to step in and push an idea along. That's what I like to do. Why agriculture? I like agriculture because it connects to a natural instinct I have for gardening. Maybe it also comes from being born on a farm. It has been an evolutionary process. It probably grew out of having so many connections with the farmers over the years. I really value them. I feel that I have a good command of what the issues are in agriculture, and I think that they are interesting and challenging. It affects the whole continuum, everything from the producers to the consumers. I think about the choices we make as consumers and how it influences a whole sector of the economy.

I feel like a lot of what I am doing now relates to land use planning and government. I work with a lot of government agencies. I also enjoy the international opportunities here at Extension. There are many dimensions to my work, which says a lot about the kind of work Extension educators do. Any one of the many things I do I find interesting. I could work on any one of the projects that I am involved with and like it. I would love to just do the marketing piece, like with the

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farmers' markets and FLCB stuff. I actually like the board work, too. Any one of these areas could be a full time job.

My team helps carry the work out. It's fun that way. There are many aspects of this job that I just really enjoy. People here have to be committed to this work in order to get the job done well. It's a lot of work. You are always on call, which is only one part of it. This is a public service agency, so people are always asking for information. The other part of the job is to develop and deliver programs. Sometimes these two demands are conflicting in terms of time. I could spend the whole day answering the phone and not get any of the other work done.

The thing that I have learned about hiring people for this work is to look for someone who can be flexible. I try to help my staff in that transition from college to the world of reality. That can be difficult. I would advise anyone interested in Extension work to develop an area of expertise that they can become known for. I started with a solid knowledge of plant pathology and entomology, which gave me a subject area that was helpful to farmers. I could relate with the production issues. I was good at this one thing when I started, but then you are thrown into many new projects. You have to become flexible. You just have to establish your credibility in some area first, to establish credibility with the farm community, or with whomever you are working with. You do need to be good at something and become respected for that. Then you can go beyond that. Then you can grow from there. You can spread your wings in many ways in Extension. We have people that are succeeding because they are willing to work hard at staying on top of one area. That also keeps me going.

Extension has been a great place to be for me. I care for the whole system. I really do. I think Extension here is structured really well. It's just great to see the energy in the staff. It's really paying off. It's just fun to see a concept just take off. It really does matter about the people. You just can't give up. Sooner or later it will pay off.

# profile

## Nancy Potter

*Assistant Director and Issue Leader, Family and Community Well-Being  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County*

**M**y classification is Assistant Director and Issue Leader for Family and Community Well-Being. The assistant director part is a Tompkins County association-wide responsibility that I have held for the last four or five years.

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Kim Niewolny**

**March, 2002**

The other half of my job is the Issue Leader for Family and Community Development, a component of Family & Community Well-Being. This marks my 23rd year as an Extension educator.

Extension allows me to be active with the community. What keeps me here is that my job changes. People keep changing, and the community keeps changing. It is always interesting. It's a fresh job everyday. It keeps me motivated.

Extension's role is to constantly be looking ahead at what the issues in the community are, to look for opportunities for an educational response, intervention, or some sort of education that can have an impact on an issue. It's all about figuring out what the goals of the community are, *with* the community. That is historically how I see Cooperative Extension's role. It's what we have carved out as our niche in the community. We bring research and practices together, so they can be part of local discussion and action.

This organization—Tompkins County-Cornell Cooperative Extension (TC-CCE)—has been one that takes a lead getting people together organizing around



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an issue, helping them to see how something different could happen, how a positive change could take place. If that change makes a positive impact, and the community wants to continue it, then we try to spin it off or find a way to sustain it so we can go on to the next issue or opportunity. There is this constant flow of “get in there, work with it, pull people together, find out what is going on,” so that we can make a difference by bringing together the resources and the strengths of the community with the research of the university. Sometimes it is just a short-term effort, and sometimes it takes years.

I strive for longevity in program development; *Parents Apart®: Helping Children Cope with Separation and Divorce* is one example. TC-CCE started this demonstration research and extension project in 1997 with a broad community collaboration. We then passed

it on to a collaborator who now manages the program. *Parents Apart®* helps parents understand the impact of this family transition and to add to their parenting skills. It was designed to help them parent separately in a way that helps their children grow in healthy ways. They also learn how to keep their children out of the middle of the adults’ conflict. There was a strong desire for it to continue and we passed it on and are still part of the advisory committee. This shows how we look to sustain programs that are effective by developing ways the community can continue them.

Then there was the Small Business Energy Efficiency Program. Through special state funding, we helped coordinate a six-county effort to do energy audits for small businesses, farms, and not-for-profits. Over a period of six years, we found that many thousands of dollars of savings could be accomplished if businesses instituted energy saving recommendations. When that state funding stopped, we didn’t have other resources to continue it. However, utility companies were doing residential audits and they expanded into these other sectors. This is another example of how programs can be sustained.

I find great satisfaction in our efforts when I know there is a lasting impact. It is also an expectation of our funders to see results. About half of our funding comes from taxpayer dollars. Citizens—the taxpayers—deserve to see something for their investment. I feel responsible for that. When we have specific grants that fund projects, funders want to know upfront what our goals and objectives are. If the program’s objectives don’t work out, funders want to know why; we want to know why, too!

**It’s all about figuring out what the goals of the community are, with the community. That is historically how I see Cooperative Extension’s role.**

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It's interesting how I came to Extension. I didn't wake up one day, and say, "Oh, I think I would like to be an Extension educator." I came from a rural community where I grew up on a dairy farm and was involved in 4-H. My mother was hired as an Extension educator with 4-H home economics in Cortland County when she graduated from college. Cortland County was where she ended up falling in love with and marrying my father. He had started a farm there. My parents were active as 4-H volunteer leaders and they were both part of 4-H when they were growing up. They grew up on farms, and the 4-H system offered them opportunities to learn new things, to go to new places, to connect statewide, and even connect nationally with other youth. It was a great system for them; it was a relatively young national organization at that time. So I grew up around the whole Cooperative Extension notion. It's kind of like being a preacher's kid: 4-H and Cooperative Extension were part of our family life!

I didn't really know what direction my professional life would take when I graduated from high school. I applied to colleges between my junior and senior year, and I also applied to be a Rotary exchange student. Rotary International is a service organization with an exchange student system for high school students to live a year in another country. Part of their mission is international understanding and peace, along with local community service. When I was accepted, I opted to be a Rotary exchange student and postpone college for a year.

I traveled to the second largest city in Costa Rica. It wasn't really large, but I was living in a city for the first time. This experience was an important part of my development because that year I discovered how similar community is in different parts of the world. I realized the strong sense of community that the family I lived with there had. It wasn't the whole city, but they had a strong network of family and friends. Plus, in the central park in the evenings, people would walk around and connect with each other. It was all of this community interaction with the shopkeepers, the market place, and the hustle and bustle of it all that I thought was phenomenal. It was a wonderful experience: the threads of community, the value of people working and living and playing together. My own community, a rural farming community, had similar networks. It was the '50s and '60s and everybody looked out for everybody else's kids. If you got into trouble, your parents knew it before you got home. It was a pretty close-knit community.

I came back from Costa Rica and went to Cornell as an undergraduate. I studied Community Service Education in the College of Human Ecology, which was in transition at the time from the College of Home Economics. Thinking that education was important, I concentrated in human development with an emphasis on adult education. I realized that I did not have a real passion for teaching in public

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schools or any kind of formal system. This led me to a non-formal education route.

I did an internship in my senior year with Extension educators here in Tompkins County. I didn't feel I did anything exceptional or anything outstanding, but I received a lot of positive feedback from my advisors at Cooperative Extension and my professor for the internship course. It made a very big difference in what I decided to do. It was the first time that I had a sense that what felt so ordinary and normal to me was in someone else's eyes a talent; that was really helpful feedback.

I graduated and went off to VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America, now under Americorps\*VISTA). VISTA is the domestic Peace Corps and was created as part of the War on Poverty. Americorps now recruits youth out of high school to be volunteers, and VISTA recruits college graduates and older volunteers. I spent a year with a neighborhood legal project in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It was not what you would think of as the center of poverty, but there was some extreme poverty. I was assigned to a neighborhood community organizing project. I thought, "What is community organizing? I don't know what I'm doing." I talked to people and listened to them. I found out what their issues and dreams were. There was a neighborhood association made up of homeowners, renters, citizens, businesses, and neighborhood leaders. I was basically their hands and feet for a year to help get things done.

Some of my VISTA training was in Chicago. It was the end of the Saul Alinsky-style of VISTA community organizing. I got a taste of the more radical type of organizing, and knew that wasn't my style. Yet I was real excited about citizens' voices being heard. My best friend in college said, "Nancy, you went off to VISTA and came back cynical." I was much more questioning of our national policies, for example, the Vietnam War, and realized I needed to find ways to be actively involved.

VISTA gave me some grounding about what some of the issues were for communities. The VISTA experience was great because I was seeing what was happening from the community's perspective. It was blue-collar and grassroots, not a college or intellectual environment. As a VISTA volunteer I could say, "I am one of you and I am willing to help, but I am going to be gone. It's your community. It's what you want to see happen that's really important." It was a very special year. Ours was one of the last of VISTA's community organizing efforts. This type of grassroots organizing was phased out of VISTA's repertoire during the Nixon administration.

I learned a lot from the people who were part of the Nebraska Neighborhood Association in Fort Wayne. They were patient with my ignorance and my naivety, and they helped me learn what I needed when I needed to know it, so I could be a part of the change. There were individuals in that group who were not daunted;

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they knew their community could be better. They wanted to do something for the youth, so the youth didn't have time to vandalize the neighborhood. The people of that community wanted to see their kids grow up to be responsible adults. The group also wanted to have a voice in some City Hall policies. The banks had redlined their area because it was in a flood zone. So there were big issues they were dealing with and these residents wanted to do something. It's the people who care and make the commitment—those people are the heroes. They are the *real* heroes.

After VISTA, I went to the Albany area and had another pivotal moment. I had two interviews, one day after the other. One was for a 4-H position, an urban 4-H project. The other was with the Girl Scouts. I basically knew nothing about the Girl Scouts, but I had grown up with 4-H. The 4-H position had had six people in five years. The Girl Scout position was presented in such a way that showed how the system, and the organization, was really there to support the volunteer leaders and the girls in the program. It really appealed to me.

I accepted the Girl Scout Council position. It was a time in my life when I said, "You know, I have never done this." I'd never been involved in this program, so it was time I found out about it. I needed to see what it was offering to the girls,

**I want to talk about a little project that illustrates the challenges, the joy, and the impact that this job brings. It started as a visioning project in the town of Newfield.**

the volunteers, and the communities. I was there from 1975–78, a little over three years. I started in a position working in neighborhoods with volunteer leaders, supporting them in their role as Girl Scout leaders. And I was getting leadership training! A couple years later I was program director council-wide. I was doing "Train the Trainer" projects and working with some awesome people. It was a great experience

learning about adult learning, training, and facilitation.

I left the Girl Scout position after three years because I had a love and he was building a house in Tompkins County. So I decided to move. It was heart wrenching in lots of ways. I had become enmeshed in the community there through a faith community, the Girl Scout community, and through a great network of friends. It wasn't easy for me to leave these communities; I had connected with them so easily.

I moved back to the Ithaca area and found a position as an administrative assistant for nine months on the Cornell campus. Then a position with TC-CCE opened up and I applied. There were some experienced Extension educators in the pool, so I just applied for a lark. When they called and offered me the position, I

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couldn't believe it; that was 23 years ago!

I want to talk about a little project that illustrates the challenges, the joy, and the impact that this job brings. It started as a visioning project in the town of Newfield. Dan Winch, the county board representative for the town of Newfield, approached me and explained that he had been trying over the years to find ways for Newfield to come together to take advantage of some of the things that the county had to offer, say through the county planning department. Dan had really tried to work with the town, and was the spark plug to all of this. He felt badly because there would be grants that the county board had to offer that bypassed Newfield because the town didn't have a strategic plan. He was approving dollars to go to these other communities and Newfield wasn't eligible; they needed a written document that said, "This is what we want to do," such as commercial center revitalization.

Dan and I talked about the work TC-CCE had done in some other communities. There was a project we called Community Links. Community Links was conceived to facilitate a municipality linking with local resources, its own municipality or county, the land-grant university or with whatever resource they needed to develop their plan. We helped facilitate the linking. We did this work in Groton, Caroline, and Jacksonville. Its basic goal is to promote leadership development for building community. That is a mouth full, but it is descriptive of what this is about. It's about local leadership. It's about developing the assets and strengths they have to build their own community. We are interested in pulling people together and helping them determine in what direction or with whom. One of the tasks is to figure out what the vision is—where are they going and what are their goals? In the Community Links project, we asked towns, "Who are the people you would like to bring together? What are the issues on the table? Who is there to help support you working on these issues?"

We selected a couple of communities to start with and Groton was one. They were successful because they pulled together so many key stakeholders: not only individuals, but also the organizations with which they were connected. Examples would be with the superintendent of the school district, the school board, town board, village board, and business associations. They wanted to see this community move forward. They brainstormed. Then there was a wider network of groups and organizations that they invited into that process.

So Dan said, "I want to see this happen in Newfield." Taking the Community Links model, but knowing we had very limited resources, I talked to the Executive Director here at TC-CCE, who is supportive of this kind of community development work. I then connected with Karen, the county planning department circuit

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rider. Some of this work looked like a county planning role. However, in meeting with the planning commissioner, and some of the other folks involved, it was clear that they didn't have the staff time to do this kind of "tilling the soil" work in local communities. They had people who would help communities write grants to pursue the goals in their plan, but they really didn't have time to work with the local core group of people to ask, "What would a visioning process look like here?" or "What do you hope would come out of it?"

Dan, Karen, and I sat down with Newfield's town board. We talked with them about what this process had been like in other communities and what they hoped

**Part of my role is to say, "Who is missing from the table? Who is missing from this conversation?" or "Who else do we need to hear from?" Their voice is important in creating the future. For me, this is a premise for this kind of work.**

for in their community. We worked closely with the town board, asking them what they were concerned about in this process. We asked for their input on an agenda for community meetings. One of their concerns was that there had been a fair amount of conflict in other situations in Newfield. The "Z" word—zoning—had always been a red flag there. There are people who have said, "Over my dead body!" and others who say, "But we have to do something here or we are not going

to have the kind of community that we want to live in." It was a tough situation for the town board.

The town board became more involved in the process. I asked them to list a number of organizations that they were connected to who should know about this and who needs to be invited. There was a diverse list: homeowners, renters, business owners, laborers, people new to town, and people who have been there for years. Part of my role is to say, "Who is missing from the table? Who is missing from this conversation?" or "Who else do we need to hear from?" Their voice is important in creating the future. For me, this is a premise for this kind of work. I think it is for most community developers. That is, to be able to look at who is not there and to be able to ask, "Whose voice is missing?" As an outsider, I can say that because I don't know. I can say very openly and ignorantly, "Who else needs to be here? Who's not here?" So at every community meeting, we asked those questions.

I keep referring to "we." "We" are the people who were facilitating. I did a lot of the facilitating, but I also involved several of the town board members. I sat down with them and said, "Here is a process that we did before. Would this work?"

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The town supervisor welcomed people and did some basic “why are we doing this” explanation, and other members helped with the activities.

The first activity in this process was to list the strengths of the community. We asked people, “What do you like about this community?” In this case, community meant the town of Newfield, as a geographic location. We had people off the tops of their heads and from the tops of their hearts talking about the qualities they liked in the town of Newfield. We had a wonderful list. There was everything from the beautiful hills, to the wildlife, to the little hamlets and the little stores, to the comfort people had with knowing and not knowing people. It didn’t matter what people valued; it was *all* valued. The strengths people mentioned were all listed. This is something I feel strongly about. If people say a word, it is written on the newsprint. There is no changing what they say; *their words* are powerful. Their words mean more to them than I could interpret. I am really sticky about this. How people say things is critical. They hear themselves and when they see it written, it’s a validation that they have been heard, that it’s been recorded. When they see that “my voice” is important in this whole process, that “my voice” makes a difference by being heard, then they are more apt to hear someone else’s voice. In this way, we begin to break down the barriers we make about each other, such as, “I am not going to listen because I know what he or she is going to say.” That is the magic that happened in Newfield.

We did not start out by listing problems. In fact, this whole community-visioning project was not about problems. It was about the future. After we listed the strengths, the activity was “What does Newfield look like in 2010? What are the things you see? What are the physical aspects, the social aspects, and the economic aspects of it?” People wrote their ideas on sticky notes and then put them under one of several categories. I think we even created a miscellaneous category. Then I asked them to divide into three groups and sort the ideas into common themes. For example, on the piece of newsprint that said “physical characteristics” they put all the ideas that had to do with safe streets and sidewalks in one group and put together ideas around land use, such as “maintain an environment that supports water quality.” Then the groups had a chance to label those themes. We spent two and-a-half hours on this community meeting. *They* did the organizing; I just stepped back and let them go.

**We did not start out by listing problems. In fact, this whole community-visioning project was not about problems. It was about the future.**

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In each of the two sessions there were about twenty to thirty people. Later on a summer intern and I went to Newfield's high school government class that every senior is required to take. Young people's input was on the list of 'voices missing' from the community meetings, so we did the same brainstorming and sorting activity with them as well as listing the community's strengths. The activity was shortened to fit the forty-minute class period, but their voices were still heard. Some of it was flippant or out of this world, and that is okay. Another principle from this type of brainstorming that I feel is important is that no idea is tossed out. It's all kept. It's like in the fortune 500 companies' think tanks: some of the wildest ideas become the products of the future. The creative thoughts and ideas start coming together—they start linking different ideas together. It's magical; you never know what is going to come up. So between the two sessions we had about fifty people and then another twenty students. In this community of about five thousand people, seventy people from high school to senior citizen participated. Most importantly, we always asked the question: "Who is not here? Who else do we need to hear from?"

That outreach piece is important. Part of the organizing, which was a group effort, is taking flyers to different places such as the local grocery stores, markets, gas stations, laundromats, trailer parks, and so forth, and posting and mailing them. The town board and organizations were responsible for spreading the word. I put the announcement in the school bulletin and *Newfield News*, the local weekly paper. The *Ithaca Journal* also ran a little piece. Dan and I did a little interview with the *Ithaca Journal* to talk about what was happening. They had followed the Community Links project very closely; they did a lot of good publicity on that. We didn't do as much with the *Ithaca Journal* this time because of changing reporters and their priorities.

The follow-up from the community visioning meetings was a series of meetings for late summer and fall. Everyone who had signed the list at the other community meetings was invited. The community group and I met then in August. I facilitated and we worked with all of those ideas that had been categorized and compiled from the visioning process. We then created a "preferred future statement" from all of the information that community members had provided. It's going back to the strengths of the community, what people value. Questions were asked: "What do we want to preserve? What do we want to create?" or "What is it that needs to be preserved?" To be intentional about what you want to preserve helps people realize what is really important to hang on to. It was important then to be able to ask: "What do we want here? What's the foundation of our community?"

Over the summer, I had been to a workshop with Michael Kinsley from the Rocky Mountain Institute. I went with some colleagues at Cooperative Extension

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and some Enfield planning board members. We learned about a process Michael Kinsley developed for community visioning and action planning, including creating a “preferred future statement.” That resonated with me because it is a lot easier to talk about “What do you prefer for the future?” than “a vision”. So I borrowed from his process that piece of creating a preferred future statement, and also how to evaluate different project action ideas. This latter process helps assess the feasibility of the ideas based on the community’s criteria.

The Newfield group had three follow-up meetings. We met in August and then again in September and October. There were probably fifteen people, sometimes a few more, who came to each of these meetings. We circulated the preferred future statement to everyone again. Then we brainstormed project action ideas to reach the “future” that was discussed. There were a half a dozen or so ideas that emerged: a chamber of commerce, land assets inventory, community center, grant writer, and a health center. This is not a scientific process; the people who are there are setting the agenda. So again, we needed to ask, “Who’s not here?” And, any idea needs a certain critical mass of energy behind it to move. In some regard, as long as an idea is related to the preferred future—the vision—it doesn’t matter if it’s the one idea that “would move everything along.” It’s not always logical, but it’s what people are impassioned about that makes things happen. Some people may say that what this community really needs is something for toddlers or something for senior citizens. Though, if no one comes to work on that, then we’ll move where people are ready to put the energy.

We had a long list of project action ideas, but only six were written up for the group to consider. I copied and distributed those and invited people to the next meeting. At that meeting we did the “Kinsley” evaluation process where we asked another set of thirteen questions. For example: “Does it relate to the preferred future? Is it fair to all concerned? How much energy is it going to take? Are people invested in it? Do you need money from the town, state, or a big corporation? Is the impact neutral, positive, or negative?” They went through each of the project ideas and the group charted their assessments on each of the criteria. They ended up with three action ideas they thought were feasible to move forward. They formed project action committees around economic development, a land asset inventory, and a community center. These groups had their own conveners and they worked together across the projects. The community center group did some work and decided it didn’t have enough momentum to continue, so it is on hold right now. But the others have moved on and done some amazing things.

The economic development one, through the connection it had made with the county planning circuit rider, asked the town board if they would like to have

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interns that summer to help them create a strategic plan for commercial center revitalization. The town board said, “Okay.” The economic development project action group worked with them and got some sketches and ideas out. They developed a strategic plan that had the blessing of the town board. It was submitted to county planning. Now they are eligible for the county’s last cycle of grants. They

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are now working on three or four proposals for these small grants of up to \$7500. That is pretty amazing! The economic development group also invited the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce to talk with them. Following that, they decided they could start their own business association. They now have 45 businesses that are members, and they have a fundraiser on Super Bowl Sunday. The town clerk said to me the other day: “You know Nancy, it’s so great when a new person comes into the community and says, ‘I would like to start a business here. What do I need to know?’ and I can

say, ‘Why don’t you talk to these folks at the Newfield Business Association?’” Instant networking!

The land asset inventory committee has pulled together a first section for a catalog of all the GIS information that is available that can help the town government, school, business developers, and homeowners make decisions. They invited a county planning staff member to do a public GIS demonstration. Out of that, people became interested in maps and what they could do with them. That’s just the tip of the iceberg.

I continued to work with the community on these project action groups. They asked the town board to contract with TC-CCE for my time in coordinating processes with the action groups. I meet with them about every other month; a little bit more often when there is a special project we are working on.

I feel privileged to work with a community that gets excited about working together and creating their future. I never know if things are going to explode, implode, go well, or whatever. My experience tells me to trust the process. I feel that the simple facilitator role can be a catalyst. Certainly the facilitator role by itself does nothing. It’s about helping people be helpful, to trust each other. It’s

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fascinating. I haven't done formal studies, but we do get feedback that people make new connections. They hear things in new ways. They learn how much everyone cares, even the people who seem to be the most problematic. People really care and that's what's critical.

In the Newfield project, people's view of Extension, and of me as an Extension educator, were fairly neutral. I didn't have an agenda other than seeing the community come together to see what they might create. It's important to not give my opinion. I try to see where my worldview and my perceptions may be steering things one way or the other. I think that is always a challenge. Because I am a resident and taxpayer of the town of Newfield, I had to say, "It is important for you, if I slip out of my facilitator role and into my citizen role, to tell me so I can pull back." I told that to everybody. I was also facilitating at the same time in the town of Enfield. I was clear with both Enfield and Newfield that if I said the other town's name "you call me on that." And they would! It's fun, but it's also real important that they know that I am a human being, too, and I can have this tendency to slip. It's real important for them that I'm clear about my role as facilitator. If it seems like I am pushing things in a certain direction that they don't want to go, they should say, "Hey, wait a minute." And they will.

Our role as educators for TC-CCE is interesting. It's interesting because "Cornell University" is on our letterhead. And yet, we are really seen as part of the local community. Yes, CCE is an educational outreach component of Cornell, New York State's land-grant university. There are direct connections; for example, we have summer interns from the Department of City and Regional Planning or Landscape Architecture. They are working directly from the university. It's a fascinating relationship and so hard to get a handle on because we are not department-based. Rather, we're part of the Cornell Cooperative Extension system, and our role is to be educators in "the field" and relate back to various faculty members. We are a link with university resources that is once-removed.

As a facilitator in community development with a connection to Cornell, it gives me an opportunity to take from the best of the university. There is tremendous research and tremendous talent in the faculty and Extension staff at Cornell.

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I have learned from them through in-service workshops, intensive training, and by simply going to them directly to get ideas. But my talent, and my domain, is to work with local communities, so I don't have to get involved in university and department politics. (Although, that does affect what happens in our larger system.) There are enough local politics here with the county, towns, and municipalities, as well as the "turf" issues between different organizations. I need to attend to all that to find ways that we can be catalysts here with people from the community. The university and local communities are both valuable. I am trying to bring these two pots of expertise together so the local

**The university and local communities are both valuable. I am trying to bring these two pots of expertise together so the local people, the real stakeholders, can figure out what they want to do.**

people, the real stakeholders, can figure out what they want to do.

In another capacity with the Tompkins County Coalition for Families, I invite faculty researchers to dialog with us about their work. The Coalition involves mostly colleagues in health, human services, and education. Many are working with families with very limited resources and families who are having challenges. I invite researchers whose work relates to the Coalition's broader goal: to build a supportive community for *all* families. We learn about the latest research, and we exchange perspectives on the issues. By bringing researchers in to talk about what they know about, what they know best, and what they are learning from their work, they help us to think outside the box. We learn what some of the resources are and we then know how to make our work with families more effective. It is so valuable to have access to that rich research and to the people who are doing the research for our professional development with the community.

Thinking back over my career to about ten years ago, I wonder: how did I look at my job back then? Some of it is the same, but a lot of it has evolved to this place of knowing that education can be about facilitating and learning versus the classic: "Here I am. I have some knowledge and I want to share it with you. I want to impart this knowledge to you because it could improve your life." What is a facilitator if she or he doesn't help some process happen? All I am doing is helping people discover each other's passions; it's about knowing when to be there, knowing when to nudge, when to back off, and to know that you never know.

When I kept asking in the Groton Community Links project, "What are the questions you have? What other information do you need before you talk to the

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state legislators about finding funds?”, a wise person said to me: “Nancy, we’ve been working on this problem for the past 23 years. *We are impatient and we’re ready to go!*” Almost taken aback, I said, “Are you really ready to go?” He answered, “Yes, we’re ready!” So I said, “You’re going! You’re going!” What more did they need? They had enough background and they had a clear vision. If they had more questions, they would have to do more homework. They ended up “magically” receiving half a million state Department of Transportation dollars to re-pave and re-curb their Main Street and redo the sidewalks. Not bad for a little town and a few meetings!

# profile

## Sally Cunningham

*Extension Educator, Community Horticulture  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County*

**M**y title is Extension Educator in Erie County. I've been here something like ten years. I had such a gradual entry into Extension, it's hard to say when I started working formally. I first came as a Master Gardener volunteer. Then

**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Jeremy Sporrong**

**March, 2003**

suddenly, the commercial horticulture educator was desperate to do something with this floundering Master Gardener program of twelve people and said, "Please, do what you can with it." I came in twelve hours a week, then fifteen, then eighteen, then twenty-one. It was slow progress until, finally, about three years ago, the board figured out how to fund half a position for me. So my job is half within the budget; we raise the other half of the funds through our programs. It's not what you call job security, but nevertheless we go on. Horticulture is really a valuable component, so it will be here as long as Extension is here.

My program is Consumer and Community Horticulture. Half of what I do is achieved through this huge Master Gardener program. The other half is where I consider myself to be a direct educator, where I myself am teaching, doing media or other direct relationship work with my public. I balance it that way because the management of the Master Gardener program can be so all-consuming that if I let it, I would be missing a range of other opportunities. How my work actually blends



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into individual consumer, consumer groups or community groups is a big mish-mash. The difference between “community” and “consumer” is a fuzzy line, and I don’t tend to differentiate the two.

In my work, I tend to think in terms of long-term and short-term development. I’m doing a lot of work with people who become my long-term development targets—people like Master Gardeners who come in unable to speak to a group, but have great enthusiasm. Two or three years later, or sometimes even ten years later, they become the main experts who go out and lecture on compost. So many of our audience relationships, whether it is the Master Gardener or the public audience, are people who grow right under our noses and have a long relationship here. My short-term targets, especially because I do a lot of highly visible media, are like seeding acres of fields—some seeds take and some don’t, but there are a lot of things that do grow. I repeat weekly TV and newspaper coverage, and I’ve found it has a lot of cumulative impact.

An important point about Master Gardener volunteers is that key word, “volunteers.” That key word helps to get it in people’s head what the Master Gardener program is all about. It is not just a gardening course. This title should be a copyrighted, linking the volunteers to the land-grant program across the country. The Master Gardener volunteers, with an education based in the land-grant colleges, ours being Cornell, are those who want to learn scientifically-based horticulture that they in turn will share to their public. They are the outreach and extensions of myself and Extension. They are extensions of Extension.

There are 1,700 or so Master Gardeners in New York State and about 125 of them are mine. We give about sixty hours of training and a big exam. Once they have completed the training, they are then required to give fifty hours of volunteer service for two years. After that, they have to keep up a certain level of volunteer work to stay active. I have people who have been active since 1980 who still do from fifty to one hundred plus hours a year. For many, it is a way of life, or as I tell my volunteers in training, it’s a lifestyle change. Volunteering becomes the thing they do in retirement and the thing they do on weekends. It’s a passion. It’s not just busy work. So they become community garden leaders, teachers, speakers, expert soil pH testers, question answerers at fairs and events, and so many more

**So many of our audience relationships, whether it is the Master Gardener or the public audience, are people who grow right under our noses and have a long relationship here.**

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things. In my county, Erie County, there are probably forty different projects that Master Gardeners actively pursue.

I backed into Extension through a part-time job. At the same time, I was pursuing my own horticulture education. I had become a garden writer and published garden books through Rodale

**Nobody is an expert; we're all learners. We're all at a different stage of learning, that's all.**

Press. While I was part-time at Extension, I was actively growing as a horticulture expert and, eventually, a published expert. Well, so-called expert. Nobody is an expert; we're all

learners. We're all at a different stage of learning, that's all.

For me, my passion for horticulture and gardening are rooted in my childhood with Grandpa who walked me in the woods, made me like snakes and taught me about living things in the soil. So I got the magic from Grandpa. It wasn't until many years later, coming back after years in New York City as a career person that I had a chance to work with the magic. Not until then did I finally have land and a garden where I could pursue organic gardening. The organic choices are very important to me. At age thirty-seven, after several careers and having redefined myself several times I had an epiphany and said, "A-ha, not sure what the job is, but this is the medium I want to work in for the rest of my life."

I grew up in Eden, which is here in western New York, south of Buffalo. Eden had a nice rural school. I always felt like a misfit because I was an overachiever, extremely intense, a little rebellious, but getting great grades. I was eager to sprout wings and fly away as soon as I could. The key word for me, that which I value and what I think makes me go, is resourcefulness. Resourcefulness, as I found out when I began with Extension, is one of the best features of an Extension educator. I always felt like I wanted adventure in the life process and did not necessarily want to be defined as something; like I never wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up. I just wanted to experience.

I started college at Alfred University. I took the junior year in Spain. When I came back, I went to SUNY Buffalo where I finished and got my Master's degree in humanities. I loved that junior year in Madrid. I learned Spanish, and I'm still fluent, and it still comes up in my life. I occasionally use it with various populations, more in New York City than Buffalo, but some here too. When you live in another culture, you gain a perspective that's a strengthening quality. I would recommend it for anyone. You will never look closed-mindedly at things again. You will always know there are whole other ways of being. Lots of people operate as if their little provincial single method is all there is, and that's what makes people so judgmental

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and righteous. It leads to some real problems.

After college, I went to New York City to be an actress. I hiked around doing auditions in the theater district and eventually, so as not to be poor while waiting for great breaks, got some jobs in government. Eventually, I decided I didn't want to be a starving actress and live with that many cockroaches. So I said, "I'll get a respectable job and use my brain instead of my acting talent." I worked as a management intern for the GSA, the General Services Administration, which was a really competitive, cool opportunity for young budding executives of the future. Then the '74 energy crisis broke, and it was a mess in government. A new law had been legislated, and we had to interpret it and get petroleum distributed to people lining up in trucks outside the Federal Trade Center. It was an amazing opportunity for a young, energetic person who wasn't bogged down by the way things were always done. When I look back, I think I was probably unbearably enthusiastic and sure of myself. I would tell a GS-15 how we should do it. It was probably just awful for them to have this young whippersnapper, and a couple others like me, try to take over. But that's what it took in a time of chaos. Some people thrive and rise to the occasion and others scratch their head and say "What the heck should we do next?" I wasn't cowed by tradition and went forward and said, "Let's divide up the petroleum cases this way and that way." And by golly, I ended up with a career built out of seizing the moment.

I had several years in the federal government in New York City. I was quickly raised from a GS-9 to 12 to 13. I ended up with a fast career track based on grabbing that opportunity and just using my native brain rather than anything that I was ever taught at a college. Once in a while you get those chances in life. It's probably like going in the Peace Corps or something where you have to make it up as you go along. At some point, my career choice was to either grow by moving to Washington D.C. or to stay at my highest level in New York City. I didn't want to move. So I said, "Nope, I'm going to market myself new."

A pattern in my life has been, when in doubt, go to the library and study-up on how to do something. So I went to the library and studied how to change career tracks. In the process, I read a great book called *Executive Jobs Unlimited*. It was a life-changing book for me. I did everything it said. I learned how you sell what you've done in one field, articulate it in quantifiable terms, and market yourself to some other business. I wrote 300 broadcast letters targeting for specific industries and ended up with four tangible career offers at a \$30,000 level. It was just amazing. I was just going cold into some new field. It was all marketing. In a way I still use things like that with people I know who are out of jobs and facing hard times. I can't imagine how they can think that they aren't marketable anymore just because

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their business closed. So I often use my own personal story to demonstrate.

I jumped to insurance where they hired me as a fresh new go-getter. It was really sales, but they called it an account executive. I would make phone calls, open doors and create association programs. Sounds boring, but it wasn't. Instead of a bunch of individual needs, I would see common needs and would then group the needs together and say, "Let's form an association for this kind of insurance." I became the first woman vice president in marine insurance in that part of the insurance industry in lower New York. I worked as a broker with Marsh and McLennan and a couple of other firms and ended up with a specialty in seafood imports insurance. In summary, I would say that I just saw an opportunity to create a new insurance program and got ahead through resourcefulness.

I had several good years in insurance, but then there was an economic downturn. At some point, I went from an executive job in the World Trade Center—I think I was on the 102nd floor, in the most elegant and expensive place in the world—to a president with tears in his eyes, who fired me, saying, "Oh, I really hate to do this." My program, which had suddenly taken a downturn, had lost a lot of money, so it, along with many others, was cut. I went from a great situation to being cut. That experience was a breakthrough in individual growth for me. I've always believed that if I landed in Kansas City with two cents in my pocket, I could rebuild myself and make a new life. But this was the first time that I really had to do it—to go from a lot of security to zero security. I had high rent to pay to keep a Manhattan apartment. I had to prove that I could keep it together all by myself. So that was like reinforcing confidence in independence and resourcefulness. It was an important self moment.

To give myself a break, I went to International Bartenders School and got a fun, interesting bartender job in the Broadway district. I guess I chose bartending because I've always respected real-world working people who honestly earn a living with some sweat. I never felt you always had to live your life in a suit. I just said it was time for me to earn my living in a really direct way and go home without a lot of pressure. You know, you go home, you wash your hands, you wash your uniform, and you start over again.

I played bartender for a while, then I knew it was time to shift. I'm also an okay piano player, so after bartender school I said, "I'm going to get the first piano or bartender job I can get on Third Avenue." I started on Third Avenue in New York City at 95th street, walking downtown, and I went into every bar I saw. If they had a piano I said, "I'm looking for a job; would you like to hear me play?" If they didn't have a piano, I said, "Looking for a bartender job; how 'bout it?" I think it was 59th Street, at Fortune Gardens, a big Chinese restaurant with a lounge, where

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I was hired. It took me 34 blocks to get hired. It was another one of those cases where I think, “My goodness, the things we dare to do when we are young.” I don’t want anybody to think I’m that great; it’s just that I had the “moxy,” which is a New York word. I had the guts to try for it.

It was nice to have cash in my pocket and not a lot of pressure, but I worked hard. The people interaction was great, though. So it was good for that time. I was young and fresh-faced enough that the bar customers flirted a lot. But on the other hand, sometimes they treated me like a mother, even though I was way too young for them. People who are drunk enough just forget who you are. They just really need a shoulder and a listener. People are lonely everywhere. You have the same thing on the Garden hotline. People call here and our Master Gardeners end up practically counseling until they can move them along. People sometimes just want someone to talk to them. In bartending, the medium was the drink; in this case, the medium is the gardening. People just need connection.

**People call here and our Master Gardeners end up practically counseling until they can move them along. People sometimes just want someone to talk to them. In bartending, the medium was the drink; in this case, the medium is the gardening. People just need connection.**

At some point in here the adventures changed because I spent 12 years in Manhattan and for various reasons (I won’t tell the romances side of the story) I moved to Brooklyn for a job on the other side of the river. Then I got a real estate job in Brooklyn for a little while. That’s when I met my future husband. I was mugged. He was the neighborhood association president, and after I was mugged, I called up and said “This is just terrible. How are we going to patrol this neighborhood?” That is when I met this very nice man who became my husband.

Together, we wanted to move to rural America. We both had the dream of some land and some animals and maybe a family. We both wanted out from New York City at the same time. Crack cocaine had hit the streets of New York in about 1984 so sharply, and everybody was mugged. It was just the final straw. And so, it was time to come to where the quality of life was different, sometimes not as rich, but definitely more comfortable. We moved here. I had a child. And suddenly I was in a place where I could have my own organic garden and animals. So I dug into horticulture. It was a long trip, and it’s not at all an obvious one, except to me.

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If I had to tell just one practice story of what I do, I'd start with last summer's project with teenage youth in Buffalo. My job last summer was educating and helping the youth create gardens. In collaboration with the city of Buffalo, this program had eighty kids and five supervisors. We created sixteen new gardens over a seven-week period. It was a major achievement in terms of garden production, design and planting. The teaching went on continuously and I felt that I was doing the epitome of Extension, the epitome of education at all levels. I'd be teaching kids at one moment, real direct: "This is where the tree roots are, and this is why we don't step on them, and here's how we protect them by this stuff called mulch." And as they were putting down mulch, they were learning about tree roots. This was at the youth level.

On another level, I was teaching the Master Gardeners who were volunteering to work with these youth. I wasn't just teaching them the subject, but teaching them how you talk to youth, how you talk to people of different ethnic backgrounds, and how you listen to what they are asking first, because it isn't what you always assume. So developing the abilities of the volunteers as they interact was another component.

Then there was the education of the supervisors who were really there to count the hours. But they were getting hooked in, and for the first time they were gardening. Some of them took it home to their own lives. We were reaching to this community group who had wanted the project and would become the owners of it. For the first time, they were participating in developing this garden that they would go on with. So they too were getting the education and catching on to having ownership. It was education at multiple levels every minute of the sweaty, hot days. It was just super. At the end of it, we had real gardens to show.

**We created sixteen new gardens over a seven-week period. It was a major achievement in terms of garden production, design and planting. The teaching went on continuously and I felt that I was doing the epitome of Extension, the epitome of education at all levels.**

Yesterday, I had a meeting with Youth Opportunities (YO), the youth organization that we worked with last summer. Last year, they gave us some funding. This year, I've learned that there is almost no funding, but they'd like us to do it again anyway. A reality in Extension is that we have to find out how to develop funding and not just go out and work for someone else for free. I'm thinking creatively about how we can follow-up and keep

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Yester

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going back to the community groups and the gardens we started. We can follow up, advise, recommend. We can show weeding, show what are perennials coming back, show mulching and review the watering systems. We are going to go back, but we're not going to gain a lot of funding out of it. So on one hand, I'm looking back fondly at last year's real cool thing and how not to let it slip away because the funding is different. On the other hand, I'm looking for the next opportunity. If the city Youth Opportunity program can't do it, maybe the county parks can take us on. Maybe there is another youth component where we can do some of the same great things, but in a different direction.

So that is one way we are trying to not lose momentum—by doing great work and not letting economic times throw us off from worthwhile missions. You don't want the money to drive the ship. You know it can happen sometimes. I don't want to take a grant to do something just because we can get the money for it. I want to keep it mission relevant, where real learning and real growth occur.

So that is Part I of my practice story. Part II is where I've created basic gardening classes in different parks in Buffalo, where the Master Gardeners and I teach. Again, some of these Master Gardeners are teaching their first class and some of them have been doing this for twenty years. Some of them are going into parts of the city they never went to before. So there are a lot of different adventures going on. The first project, on the East side of Buffalo, in one of the more impoverished, socio-economically deprived neighborhoods, was in a big building that functions as a senior center called "Friends to the Elderly." I had invited community leaders and community garden group leaders. They were mostly elderly ladies who are powerhouses in their neighborhoods. Not knowing who would come, I had the Master Gardeners and myself all ready to do a two-hour class. We got there at one o'clock, ready to go, and one person was there. So disheartening. But then, two and then three people, and then a bus came from another section of town with one of those little powerful ladies bringing six people. Then came another van with another little frail-looking powerhouse who brought another four people. We ended up with twenty people and a wonderful class.

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The talk was about soil and compost. Real breakthroughs were occurring. One of them was a young woman, an employee of Friends to the Elderly, who was sent by her boss. Her boss said, “You got to learn how to take care of the flowers around this building.” She was thinking, “What a pain.” But as we taught, light was breaking through. Her first question, after people had been talking about raised beds, was, “I’ll be the stupid one, so what is a raised bed anyway?” So the Master Gardeners

realized, hah, we hadn’t gotten it across. And they went back a little. After that, she said, “Oh I could do that!” She said, “Last year I went out in my backyard. I wanted to grow some flowers. I started poking with a stick and a shovel, and I said forget this, I don’t know what I’m doing, and I went back in the house

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and never did anything. But this year,” she said, “That’s what I have to do? I can do that.” Suddenly she knew how to make compost and how to build up a raised bed. She could get some boards and so forth, and all of a sudden she was excited. She’s got the job pruning the shrubs around that place, so now she’s motivated. She was one breakthrough.

There was another young man sitting there who was also sort of shuffled off to this class because he was hanging out to drive the bus or something. He sat there, and it was like dawn breaking through. I was talking about picking up other people’s leaves and using your kitchen scraps, like coffee grounds and fruits and vegetables, to make compost. This young man said, “Now wait a minute, let me get this. You take the garbage? You put it in the dirt? And then it’s this?” We passed around the soil. “It turns into this?” he said, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” Wonderful! It was just like he was in wonderment.

So there was a light dawning. When you have those moments, you know it’s real teaching, that they’re getting something. This young man and the others even asked, “Why doesn’t everybody do this? Why do we throw our leaves in the dump?” And I said, “Yeah, that’s it. You’ve got it. We need to teach everybody don’t we? So let’s get all the neighborhood leaves into these piles in your neighborhood and in the community lots, and let’s do this.” We talked about the problems of urban composting, and people who are afraid it will bring rats, and what you do to prevent that. So we got into the real nitty gritty breakthroughs on larger societal issues. It was wonderful!

My job is all about introducing people to the systems of how it all works, whether that’s out in nature or applicable to practical solutions in everyday life and

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how these things work in their own communities. It's getting them to think about systems. I personally don't like the word "capacity building" because to me it's just the newest catch phrase when other times different administrators laid upon us new definitions of what we did here in Extension. To me, what we've been doing all along is truly what education is supposed to be: *educara*, to lead. We are leading people into real learning, real thinking. Once you start them on that path, there is no end to what people can do in solving problems for themselves. It's how to think about problems, how to ask the questions and follow a concept through to the end. It's very exciting when you have these moments. The Master Gardeners are wonderful. Some are just learning how to do some of this. But even if they are sitting in and I have a breakthrough moment with someone, another time they will even be quicker to hear this opportunity in another student, and they will be better at it.

The Extension office in Erie County is on a campus with the Arts & Crafts Movement. One of the movement's leaders is Elbert Hubbard, the great community leader and thinker. He had engraved on one of the Roycroft Inn doors across the street a saying that is real important to me. It says, "Produce great people, the rest follows." That's what we're doing. We are helping to produce great people and the rest follows, whether it's that young man who got a breakthrough or somebody else.

In my educational approach, I like watching my students catch on to natural systems and how they work. They begin to understand that you can never do just one thing, like kill a bug, because this thing has to do with the next prey it was eating. In the same sense, whether it is our societal systems or in nature's systems, your impact on a child or your impact on a butterfly all has to do with a larger connection. In showing people the connections you are doing a lot of the real education. Like that example with the guy saying that you don't have to put your leaves on your street in the garbage dump. You can get them back into the soil. Well, he just hadn't ever seen such a close system as Mother Nature had worked out between the soil and the tree leaves. So there was that kind of learning moment.

**My job is all about introducing people to the systems of how it all works, whether that's out in nature or applicable to practical solutions in everyday life and how these things work in their own communities. It's getting them to think about systems.**

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Another part of my work is about organic gardening. Teaching about beneficial insects in the home garden is my best talk. It's not just that I want to teach people to be kind and not kill insects because of the inherent importance of the insects. That's true, yes. But I think we can get people to have a little reverence and wonder at all the things these insects are doing and how many of them are out there cooperating in what you want to achieve. If we can get people to be a little bit respectful of such a simple living thing that translates upward into a huge need in our society. We have people in cities, and even children in the suburbs, sitting behind computers who have never walked in the woods, never climbed a tree, never smelled the soil or lay down in a field.

So I care particularly about the organic message in terms of teaching people a respect for life and a reverence for the awe of nature and its systems. I also teach the idea that we aren't all in charge here. We're not all controlling everything. You don't have to go out and buy a product to kill a bug just because you saw it. Rather, the more you understand about how it all works, the less you need to do that controlling thing. I really do think our society needs more people to think like that

**To me, what we've been doing all along is truly what education is supposed to be: *educara*, to lead. We are leading people into real learning, real thinking. Once you start them on that path, there is no end to what people can do in solving problems for themselves.**

instead of those who see an ant in the house and go infect everybody by spraying two cans of Raid. I definitely think people need help because they've lost touch with what our grandparents knew about nature. They knew that there are natural systems going on around us, and it's not the end of the world if a spider got in the living room. So I do have a strong sense of the mission of the content. The gardening medium is a great way to teach people other values and skills.

I'm often asked how I walk the line between my personal passion about organic gardening and working for Cornell, which certainly still teaches some chemical controls and accepts pesticides as a part of the program. For me, it was a conflict at first. When I first came here as a volunteer, I felt very, very unaccepted as an organic gardener. They were condescending and kind of skeptical. That was a long time ago though, in the late '80s. Now I find that Cornell's integrated pest-management (IPM) is the norm. Today, society and Cornell have both looked toward the most environmentally friendly alternatives to managing all sorts of problems. Now both public wishes and scientific awareness

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have become quite compatible with our environmental goals.

So I don't feel like I'm fighting the pesticide lobby. Rather, I feel if everyone did integrated pest management we wouldn't be in such a pickle. I can give my organic preferences and explain what those methods and alternatives would be and, at the same time, understand that at times somebody is going to choose a pesticide or herbicide to solve a big golf course problem. So I am comfortable with representing IPM even though I personally remain organic. I can help people with making those choices.

You can't alienate people. I know a lot of fiery environmentalists who go the alternative routes and lose the people rather than win them. All too often, they polarize the issue. I often find I can lead people more gently into the issue. For example, because of my books, I'll be asked to give a keynote address in other states or other counties around New York. I'll go out on my own time and talk to audiences of 250 and sell my books on the side, which supplements my piddly Extension income. When I do, I get lots of garden club people in the audience who all grew up when you sprayed chemicals for any given problem. I try to teach them a more humorous, warm and anecdotal side to the issue. I try to get across that these are the beneficial insects. There is sex and violence in my talk as they see how these insects and others work. I keep it humorous, but my goal is that they go out saying, "Wow, I didn't know there were so many good insects. I'm going to look for that one." I also encourage them to write down every new insect they see and go look it up and see if they can figure out what it's doing. So I get a lot of regular people who open their mind to that. So here, it is insects as the medium.

I wish I had an assistant to assign to every project, but it isn't like that. And of course, with volunteers, you don't get to fire them, and you don't even totally get to select them 100 per cent. You take volunteers, and so it's sometimes hit and miss, and sometimes a challenging kind of management.

The Master Gardeners, for example, are from every walk of life, every educational level, and have quite a variety of resources they bring. The ideal manager of Master Gardeners all over the state are those managers who can change the communication mode to suit the person and be very flexible about management style. Flexibility in our jobs is absolutely essential.

**You can't alienate people. I know a lot of fiery environmentalists who go the alternative routes and lose the people rather than win them. All too often, they polarize the issue.**

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There are many times where if I can have a good Master Gardener who has reached an achievement level in something then I'm very happy to back off and encourage that person to run with it, to be the expert and be the leader. I look for times when the volunteer is developed and ready to go by him or herself, and I'm glad to back away. But a lot of times I teach. I'd really miss it if I were totally replaced by my volunteers. I like the teaching so I certainly *do* teach. In the case of the pruning, I share the teaching with my co-educator, Karen Hall, who is our

**Networking is really important, and it's the reason why nobody can just step into another educator's job. It takes a long time to really know who you can call upon and depend upon as partners in getting the job done.**

commercial horticulture educator. In this case, we both teach pruning, using great Cornell material.

When we go out to teach people how to cut back these old apple trees, I may walk out with six people whom I've also invited. I'll invite someone from city forestry, a commercial greenhouse person, a commercial nurseryman or two, and a master forester who have all said they would be glad to help us. I may do some of the show and tell,

but I've asked other experts in the field also to be teachers and leaders. It crosses all kinds of political-government lines. The value of a few years in networking is essential to success here. Networking is really important, and it's the reason why nobody can just step into another educator's job. It takes a long time to really know who you can call upon and depend upon as partners in getting the job done. So I do a lot of development of the other leaders, but I also still do plenty of the individual leading. Back at the shop, I write newspaper articles, edit the monthly magazine and prepare the weekly TV spot to market our work and get the people to all of these events.

I think the most challenging part for me is not saying yes and not getting overwhelmed. Honestly, the biggest challenge is managing me. I have to keep my own energy up and keep myself motivated. I couldn't do this if I didn't absolutely believe in it and love it. It's much more work than the job I'm paid for. I could do a quarter of it and get away with a perfectly acceptable job, and I'm not alone in this. I know there are lots of Extension people who give hugely, just out of pure enthusiasm, momentum and belief that this is really good work to do and important. So my first job is managing me, keeping myself motivated, not letting myself get defeated by either the pure volume of all the things we could do or by administrative-economic threats, including the uncertainties in Extension in general or the need to

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go get funding. I can't let myself get wrecked by those or else I won't be effective.

What's hardest is deciding when to say no to the individual who catches me because they see me on TV and wants me to teach them how to garden in the next two hours, which I can't stop to do. Then I say, "Well, this Master Gardener can probably help you and send you some good material." So you have to decide which teaching moments you really should grab because they are priceless and won't happen again and which are the people who are just being lazy and could go read this book or learn for themselves, but instead just want to make you work. It's challenging to differentiate between worthwhile teaching moments and just being used as a source of information. That's a hard selection sometimes.

I'm often surprised by the wonderfulness of the Master Gardener volunteers. I interview them and think I have a feel for which ones are going to be the stars of the coming few years.

We only take a new class every four years or so, so I'm often just amazed by the emerging butterflies. I'm also disappointed once in a while by volunteers who can't come through. But most of the time, I'm surprised by how you just can't know what's in people until you work with them. And some of them just come through with so much more than you'd ever think. It's very heartening to watch Master Gardeners. If you ever lack faith in humanity, hang out with some Master Gardeners. It's the truth, because they usually do bring the best. It may have something to do with the nature of horticulture as our medium. You know, the nature of gardeners in general is just a fairly positive bunch of people. They believe in spring, always look to the future, tend to have patience, to think in processes and systems, and understand it takes investment in A, B, and C before you get to M, N, and O. Master Gardeners do *re-inspire* me fairly often.

There are some Master Gardeners who are great examples of just emerging and flying with it and becoming entities unto themselves. They become known as speakers, leaders and teachers. Some Master Gardeners have become true friends and my best pals. One group of friends and I created a whole fall garden fair event that's right after Labor Day. It's a whole day of lecturers, speakers and outdoor events, and that came right out of friendships with other gardeners. There was one Master Gardener, a nurseryman in a family business. He was a very good tree man, and his wife said, "Oh you'll never get him to talk in front of people." Now he goes out and does "Getting Your Shrubs Ready for Winter." He shows his snow fence, shrub

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protection, things that he has built, and is one of the best teachers of that subject in the area.

We had one, Rochelle Smith, who was a Master Gardener here and had a small interest in professional landscaping. She was working at the time, and I don't know what she was doing, but she became a leading Master Gardener and then one of the area's best known speakers on tree and turf care. Now she is developing a community college horticultural school where she is taking an important role in developing commercial employees. I can't say the Master Gardeners program takes credit for her, but we certainly influenced her. Part of her growth was certainly through everything she had learned from Extension. This was a practice place for other life and career skills. The Master Gardener program is that. It's a practicing place; a safe, developmental environment. By the way, that's what 4-H is at the youth level: a safe environment in which to develop skills.

The most rewarding aspect of my work is some of the individual emergences that surprise and please me. In these instances, people do more than I ever could have thought or solved things for me that I didn't even know to ask for. The second most rewarding aspect is what occurs in our monthly Master Gardener meetings. We'll have six projects that need Master Gardeners to do something, and the project leaders or organizations will come in and ask if we can do this. I try to select the projects; I won't say yes to everything. But I'll say, "Let me see if there are interested volunteers." So at these meetings, I ask, "Would anybody like to do this, or can anybody help with Buffalo in Bloom, our public square planting day?" I'll get eight hands! It's just wonderful to ask, "Could anybody help with . . .," and they're volunteering. And they come through. The third most rewarding aspect are those great learning moments. When you see the light bulb and the "a-ha" in the eyes of anybody, at any level, any walk of life. That's just so satisfying. Every teacher wants those.

Horticulture has a huge impact in community development. Let's say you have a down-trodden, crime-ridden block with some empty lots. As soon as people come out and start building a garden in that lot and meeting on a regular basis, a change begins to occur. When people start coming out on the street, it brings out the best in some other people who can be attracted by that positive community energy. It also starts to make the area safer. It starts to be more attractive to a buyer of the empty house. Horticulture has a huge community rebuilding effect.

We've seen that in a big way through Buffalo in Bloom. I've been on the board from the beginning of this Buffalo garden contest called "Buffalo in Bloom." It was designed so smartly. We promoted it through the city water bill so that every homeowner got an invitation to put in an application for their front yard to win a prize.

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Every district, every neighborhood, no matter how rich or poor, or what kind of income or housing, had a chance to participate. Every neighborhood is in a different district so each district had a chance to be in the competition. Even in the first year, there were 500 or 600 residential applicants saying “My front yard should be judged.” After training the judges, we send out 200 plus judges to look at every single garden and write them up and rate them. Often the homeowners interact with the judges and talk to them, with the judges always saying positive things no matter what. We’ve even seen plastic flowers, so we have to say positive things like, “Your color choices are wonderful.” But we really, really have seen amazing front yard gardens in Buffalo. That chance wouldn’t have been there without this potential to be judged and win a prize. What happens is you get one garden on a street and then, next year, there are three gardens on that same street. It has had a wonderful value.

The mayor is so pleased with it in Buffalo. We get lots of press. It’s quite a process to get the applicants out there, publicize it, get the judges trained, sort all this out, and have a ceremony in September. During the ceremony, we’ll fill the auditorium with 400 people who are there for their awards and their neighbor’s awards. We have prizes and judging for community gardens and institutions as well, like in front of the hospital or a library. We even have the “Best Blooming Bar” contest where they’ll put hanging baskets in front of the town bars. The biggest part is the residential awards though. It’s been a very big success, and it’s pointed to as a tourist attraction. It’s a real estate value, and the community spirit, neighborhood self-esteem, and those things have just been marvelous. That’s the best of gardening, when it’s much more than planting flowers.

Sometimes I have felt that the success of my efforts are in spite of the Extension system—not having nearly enough resources, not nearly enough administrative support, and all the while struggling for county money. They certainly try to support us; it’s just not always there. I do feel tremendously excited by the slow build from twelve Master Gardeners in 1991 to 125 active ones today. I was determined when I came in here to become visible and use my acting ability and my public speaking background to build the program up. I wanted to use my background to reach the media here. I really had that personal goal, to be known on Buffalo TV, and by golly I am. Strangers stop me constantly and say, “Oh, you’re the TV garden lady! You told me about this!” or “I know to cut back the roses when the forsythias bloom,” or “I don’t kill spiders anymore.” They’ll tell me in the grocery store, “I feel guilty if I kill a spider; that Sally Cunningham told me not to.” I get this all the time. It’s nice and so rewarding. A couple of times, I was out of my Sunday morning slot, unexplained, and I got anonymous phone calls, “Are you all

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right, dearie? We missed you on TV this morning. We watch you every Sunday.” I feel watched out for you know? A little TV goes a long way.

A former Cornell Cooperative Extension administrator seemed to be against educators using media. It seemed to go out of vogue because his interpretation was that it was just Martha Stewart stuff, light and fluffy. But I don’t find that at all. I have a whole public out there who has seen me every Sunday morning for five years now, and those people know where the tree roots are, why you don’t park your car

under the tree, and why you mulch around the base of the tree, but not up the trunk. They are getting a lot of principles about these things. They learn what you can do for wildlife, such as leaving a dead tree standing in the forest. They also learn to recycle the Christmas tree in the yard for the birds. There’s a whole public who has heard tons of this now and really, I know, even though it’s like scattering seeds to the wind, lots of them take. It takes repetition to get people to learn things. I’m constantly repeating. They’re getting

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the concept and the facts over and over. I think that’s a real valuable use of the media, even though it has come in and out of vogue for Extension people. Sometimes the media is the right way and sometimes it’s the long class where they take in-depth learning over a period of time.

This is an amazing position to be in. It really is good. If Extension folded tomorrow, I could go on and be an Extension educator anyway because I’ve finally gotten to be known. I could get the industry to pay for me, or something like that. But Extension is the right vehicle if we can keep it alive and well. It gives a lot of us in different fields the chance to affect people’s lives.

I heard some discussion about how Extension educators aren’t going to be the experts anymore in their content areas, but I don’t agree with that. I think the content is the vehicle. It’s what we get known for. It’s why people come to us, whether it’s the greenhouse expert or the dairy agent or the nutrition person or the gardening lady. They’re going to come to us for the content, but when they do, they also get the larger life principles: learning how to learn, how to think, how to research, how to solve problems for themselves. They get a lot more than the quick answers in all of our content areas, but we still need the gardening as the lure to get

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them in the door. They're not going to come to a meeting on "How to be a Better Citizen." Nobody would come to meetings on that. But they come to a "Gardening in your Community" class, and pretty soon they're interacting with people they wouldn't have talked to before. So it's a great medium.

I've seen relationships being built amongst the community through gardening. I've seen the wealthier people coming to horticulture school where some of them have said, "I don't know how to, but I would like to volunteer in my community. Do you know what I could do?" Pretty soon, I've got them going to the state park cutting back the garlic mustard or pruning trees in Delaware Park. There are a lot of times that they've connected to other people in the classes. Just yesterday, in this Eastside class, we had some very conservative church ladies who had probably never had a real conversation with an openly gay man. But there was a gay man there who wanted to work in one of their neighborhood gardens. So this little lady had a hat and a veil on, no less, and he's going to go work in her garden. People do get together over it.

There are a lot of conversations we're having about whether traditional classroom learning works or not. There is an emphasis that you've got to go out and be among the people. Well, you do, but you've also got to get them organized, because telling them one at a time isn't quite enough. I really have to get them to come to their church, community center or meeting place. We are going out to where the people are, but I'm still getting them into a classroom. It's not to lecture at them. It's good teaching, that's all. Yammering at people doesn't work anymore, and we all know that. But on the other hand, if you're the one who knows, and you have lots to teach, you just have to make the most of those moments.

What gives me the most satisfaction is when a project has a life of its own and doesn't need me anymore. It's just great when that happens, and it often does. I don't even need to look back because I know certain things go on that have become a volunteer's way of life, hobby, and passion—to maintain, to meet and bring in the rest of the neighborhood. That's very satisfying.

Gardening is a great medium to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities, which is a whole lot like the Extension mission. There is nothing like gardening for giving people something they can achieve themselves with no or minimal money. It encourages cooperation, enhances understandings of interactions at all levels from plant-people interaction to all other forms of life. It teaches personal skills that range from personal awareness to science concepts to patience to the phenomenon of cause and effect, meaning that the things you do have positive or negative results. So I really think that horticulture isn't just another subject

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matter. I think it's the big one. It's a huge medium for larger societal and individual growth.

The nature analogies do help people to get it. I do a sort of dramatic thing in one of my talks where I'll be speaking about "What's the big deal about these insects" and then I'll suddenly slam a book on the floor and screech "YEEEE, I killed it!" Then I'll say, "Now what's wrong with that? Isn't there something wrong if we can just kill something we haven't named? We don't know what it's doing. We don't know what it had to do with us at all. Do we want a lot of kids growing up who can do that? You know, what else do they kill? What other larger creature is the next target? Is it your little kid on the playground they push aside?" I think this is really, truly important. At the simple kindness of humanity level, it's about being a respectful living being.

We're going to get more crowded around here, and we better be able to ask, "Gee, what kind of person is that? What is he doing?" Not judging, saying, "I gotta shoot him." It's really a scary world we're entering, and I believe that respect for diversity is directly linked to how you feel about some creature you never met before. You decide it's "creepy crawly" just because it's unfamiliar. It really starts there.

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I often say that bartending and waitressing are the best training for the skills that any manager needs for prioritizing and tolerating pressures coming at you. They both require quick responses on many levels happening all at the same time. A good waitress, in a busy luncheon, has multiple pressures.

This one needs a check, this one needs a soup, I've got to make the ice tea, they want their beer, I've gotta make small talk with this guy who's trying to flirt with me, somebody else is being rude. You've got all that going on at the same time. This is perfect training for an Extension educator or an executive at any level. When I've had anxiety dreams in my life, I'd dream of waitressing, which I did during graduate school. So you know those life things are good job training.

The waitress, on the other hand, has the satisfaction of simple requests and simple solutions. The pressures and the multiple demands, that part is part of any

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job. But the difference with us is that we also have to go to the deeper implications. We have to ask what's this person learning from us. We are also trying to make sure they have the skills to ask for the soup in a nicer way tomorrow, to make better choices of soup, and we are showing them how to get the soup themselves or even how to grow it, cook it and make better ingredient choices. So yes, we want much more depth. No simple solutions in Extension.

I hope my next project will be to develop more volunteers who aren't Master Gardeners. We can't necessarily develop more Master Gardeners due to our limited staffing and resources, but there are so many adults out there who want direction and want to contribute. So when we educate, I'm looking for all the ways this person will have one more opportunity to pass it on. This way, volunteers can become the new state park volunteers. I'm doing lots of that, trying to maximize each moment and seize opportunities for larger value.

**We are good at pulling people together, empowering them with knowledge, and then assigning them to a good goal.**

Another project I'm currently working on is serving as liaison between the state park director and community volunteers. It could be Master Gardeners who are helping out or it could be other community entities working with this brand new park that's like a blank slate. This park could have garden tourism, it could have nature trails, it could have gardens with all the recommended perennials for drought landscape, or it could have a trail of the best native trees and shrubs of western New York. All of these things could be some of the best uses of this park. We're going to start out teaching pruning, and we are going there to have people practice pruning on the overgrown grape vines, apple trees and old huge lilacs. This is a big estate. So we are doing classes at Extension and may end up with fifty or eighty people going over there. They may connect to this park and become permanent volunteers of the park. We're helping to develop them and connect and maximize the opportunities for this park. We are good at pulling people together, empowering them with knowledge, and then assigning them to a good goal.

I'm also involved in the "Great American Clean Up" and the "Keep Western New York Beautiful" component of "Keep America Beautiful." Again, those are people with the motivation to take all kinds of volunteer groups. There is some funding that will support any kind of clean up. I'm aiming a lot of that effort at the cleaning up of the invasive plants in this park because that's clean up too. Hopefully, we're going to have one hundred or more volunteers at the end of May pulling

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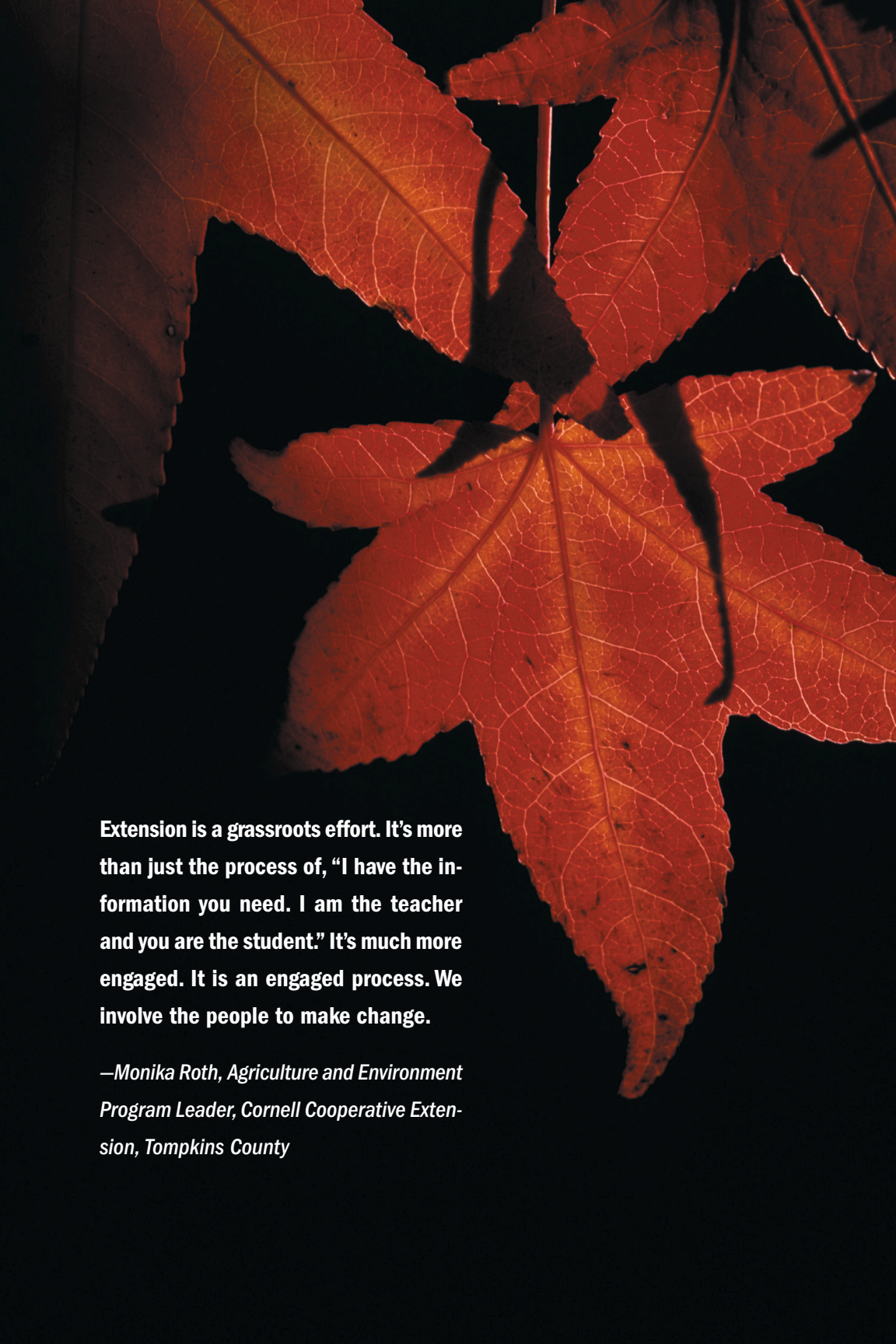
out garlic mustard. We may even be able to involve the school kids. So that's another project that has wings.

I'm in my mid-fifties, so I'm quite a few years from retirement. I'm certainly going to go on a long time. I will write more garden books. I've always been a writer of some sort. I've done lots of personal writing, so I may write fiction sometime (and it won't all be fiction). But for now, I write garden books and put some of my personal values and beliefs into them. When I'm not working for Extension anymore, I'll continue to write, do media and public speaking on subjects I'm personally developing in.

I'm starting to do more in the area of natural resources. I think a really, really important horticulture topic is the invasive plants issues and how to get people aware of two things: fighting invasives and protecting natural habitat, even emulating natural habitat, in their backyards. I'm more and more invested in that direction. My choices of educational programming will be influenced by the ways I grow. What I'll tend to teach and focus on will evolve too. On my own time, I'm studying ecosystems and forest biology because I think we're losing all the habitat; we have to do something. Sometimes that which we teach a suburbanite, for instance, what to cut down and not cut down, what to plant and not plant, does make a difference collectively. So I'd like to clone myself and a few others and multiply the efforts and get this out.







**Extension is a grassroots effort. It's more than just the process of, "I have the information you need. I am the teacher and you are the student." It's much more engaged. It is an engaged process. We involve the people to make change.**

*—Monika Roth, Agriculture and Environment Program Leader, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County*