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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

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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.



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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

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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

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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.

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."

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The third influence was taking an intersession course called "politics and policies 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

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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.

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

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

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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

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

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

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 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

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

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.