

OSU Extension has long, important history with Grovers

By **Cindy Weeldreyer**
For *The Sentinel*

The deep roots of today's Oregon State University Extension Service reach all the way back to the era of the American Civil War (1861-1865). It is a story that begins with Vermont's freshman Congressman Justin Morrill's determination and strategy to advance a growing national ideal that educated citizens were necessary for a successful democracy.

Morrill believed the federal government should establish national agricultural colleges in each state. His initial attempts to accomplish this, beginning in 1859, were thwarted by fierce opposition from southern and western states who felt the bill impinged on states' rights.

In 1862, when he reintroduced his bill, many of the dissenting states had withdrawn from the union. The new bill included one significant addition for a nation at war: military arts were added to the curriculum of agriculture and mechanical arts. President Lincoln signed the bill into law on July 2, 1862.

A dozen years earlier, in 1850, Congress' offer of free land via its Donation Land Claim Act started a stampede of settlers ready to relocate to the Oregon Territory. On Valentine's Day in 1859, the population in the Territory swelled so much that Oregon became the 33rd state to join the Union.

The year 1862 was a significant year for all of America's western states. Federal legislation provided lucrative incentives to relocate here. Two months before President Lincoln signed Morrill's bill, Congress passed the Homestead Act

It accelerated the state's population by granting adult heads of families 160 acres of surveyed public land for a minimal filing fee and five years of continuous residence on that land.

The Land Grant College Act of 1862 provided each state with 30,000 acres of federal land for each member in their Congressional delegation. These lands had to be sold or used for profit with the proceeds used to establish at least one college that would prepare young Americans for practical careers in engineering, agriculture, and veterinary medicine. The college would also offer classical studies so members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education.

Most of these new arrivals to claim the free land arrived with knowledge of agricultural practices they learned from their families in the Midwest and in Europe. They quickly discovered it was not the most effective ways of growing things here.

So, the timing was great for them to have Oregon Agricultural College open its doors in Corvallis, in 1868, with a mission to research practical solutions to real problems. OAC faculty spent part of their time traveling by horseback or train to organize farmers' institutes and to deliver lectures to far-flung communities.

Their topics aimed to improve rural life, from food safety and family nutrition to animal husbandry and pest management. Often hundreds of people flocked to these educational demonstrations designed to improve their knowledge and, subsequently, their quality of life.

The national vision began with the Morrill Act and

expanded with the Hatch Act of 1887, which established a national network of agricultural experiment stations, and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which created an extension service at each land-grant university. Together, these three federal laws established the three cornerstones of the land-grant mission: education, research, and extension.

Today there are a total of 112 land grant institutions, of which 19 are historically black and 33 are tribal. Oregon often exports its good ideas to the rest of America. This was true with its historic 1971 bottle bill to better protect the environment and it was true in the 1920's, too.

Back then, OAC organized the first of a series of statewide economic conferences, followed by county-based conferences, to define the direction of Extension education and ensure it would be valuable to those receiving it. The Extension Service continued to sponsor these conferences throughout the 20th century to identify community needs. This state strategy became the model for Extension programming across the nation.

Oregon was also the first state to create Extension 4-H clubs for urban kids, and in 1918, clubs in the City of Portland converted part of their school grounds to Victory Gardens.

Extension agents by nature are intrepid, community service-driven individuals, who love learning new things and sharing their knowledge with others. From the beginning of its existence, an agent was assigned to each county to develop programs that met local needs. To accomplish

that, OAC faculty brought research-based knowledge to communities far from campus. They creatively used whatever means they had to reach out to Oregonians: horses and buggies, steam trains, boats, and mobile classroom trailers.

In 1925, the College's Corvallis-based radio station, KOAC, signed on the air with enough broadcasting power to cover the entire state. The OAC Extension Director of Information, Wallace Kadderly, served as the station's first program director and announcer. He said at the time, "Radio erases city limits and state lines, and causes to disappear the boundaries of nations, creeds, and partisanship."

KOAC's slogan was "Science for Service," and its purpose was to make OAC's resources more fully available to the state. The station's programming revolutionized Extension's educational outreach. In its first year of operation, Kadderly selected 313 lectures to broadcast that had practical application in the home, on the farm, or in business. This public service was invaluable to those trying to survive through The Great Depression in the 1930's and two world wars.

Before YouTube and online learning, Oregonians learned new things by listening to KOAC and taking correspondence courses. The "Oregon School of the Air" broadcast radio-based high-school courses on topics from agricultural engineering to shorthand. Radio farm reports were especially popular.

Following World War II, Extension ventured into television. Its weekly program, "Oregon at Work", chronicled the people and innovations in Oregon agri-

culture and business. Today, KOAC is the flagship of a network of radio and television stations we know as Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Lane County's Extension Office has been around since 1911. County staff and local volunteers help homeowners, farmers, ranchers, woodland owners, business people, families, and individuals of all ages access knowledge and develop skills. OSU Faculty members are stationed in county offices, only if local funding is available for programs and clerical support, office space and equipment, and travel and training associated with their duties.

The Eugene Extension Office gets includes 42-percent of its annual budget from Lane County and the rest comes from a modest five-year property tax levy, which is on the May 18 election ballot.

The following programs offered locally are:

- 4-H Youth Development teaches leadership, life skill development and the value of community service through hands-on education and youth/adult learning partnerships.
- Food Preservation & Safety teaches workshop participants how to can, freeze, dehydrate and pickle foods, as well as food handling and cooking techniques.
- Home Horticulture educates workshop participants in pest and disease management, pruning, composting, sustainable landscaping, accessible gardening, school gardens, and community gardens.
- Nutrition Education promotes healthy eating and wellness education for youth and adults via school programs, pantry programs,

and helping low-income individuals and families learn how to maximize their food budgets to prepare healthy meals.

- Commercial Horticulture increases knowledge of tree fruits, nuts, berries, field crops, and integrated pest management.
 - Livestock & Forages promotes greater success with animal and feed production, integrated pest management and marketing.
 - Small Farms teaches how to do niche crop production and marketing, farm-to-consumer networking, backyard farming and organic agriculture.
 - Forestry & Natural Resources informs property owners about timber and non-timber forest products, pest and disease management, forest management, reforestation, road management, watershed sustainability, and wildfire resilience.
 - Sea Grant focuses on marine resource issues, coastal community issues, community development, and capacity.
- For 153 years, this much-loved statewide educational system has developed relevant and credible programs to respond to community needs as they've changed from one generation to the next. Its response to those changing needs has always been backed by university research and information.
- Lane County Master Gardener Leigh Rieder describes the importance of OSU's Extension Service as "a public work that increases access to University education." She adds, "Extension agents and hundreds of trained volunteers literally extend research-based information from OSU to all Oregonians, regardless of their socioeconomic status."

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