

Penn State Ag Sciences College Needs More From State

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STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences needs more money from the state to keep from continuing its decline of staff and services, University President Graham Spanier said recently.

Spanier was one of several speakers who addressed a group of more than 200 people attending the 20th annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Council of Cooperative Extension Associations (PCCEA), held April 2 at the Nittany Lion Inn, State College.

Spanier said that Gov. Tom Ridge's proposal to increase state funding for the College of Agricultural Sciences by 2 percent each for extension and research is appreciated, given the fact that almost all other state spending is proposed for some cuts.

However, the request for state funding by Spanier was for an 11.4-percent increase for each of the two budget line items.

Spanier said a 5-percent increase would maintain existing levels of staff and programs.

Because of unfunded, yet federally mandated spending, the university will actually continue to lose its financial strength and ability to retain staff and services at the 2-percent increase level of state funding Gov. Ridge has proposed.

According to a position paper distributed at the meeting, "Excluding the possibility of salary increases, we still face mandated increases in fringe benefits, inflationary costs, and federal base funding at 1.5 percent less this year than the previous year.

"At least 5 percent more in state dollars would be needed just to maintain the College's operations at the existing level and avoid further personnel reductions.

"A probable decrease in federal funds for the next fiscal year, beginning in October 1996, will further erode the College's financial base."

In recent years, state support to the college has been continually decreasing.

State funding to the College of

Agriculture began a steady decline for eight years under Gov. Robert Casey. The 11.4 percent increase in funding was an attempt to recover some of those losses.

During Casey's reign, the College of Agricultural Sciences dispersed of its herds of colored breed cattle, sheep and some other animals, reduced extension staff significantly, giving multi-county responsibilities to many agents who specialize in certain areas of expertise, as well as cutting back on other projects.

But over the past 10 years, the College has also had to improve facilities to continue to attract and maintain its students.

It spent about \$52 million in upgrading facilities such as the research farms and building new poultry and dairy research facilities.

Those expenses were deemed necessary to modernize the College's facilities in order to keep its educational competitiveness and integrity.

Despite the cutbacks, new technology has allowed the College to maintain or increase its quality of educational offerings and community outreach.

But technology can no longer be expected to make up for continued losses of funding and Spanier called upon the members of the PCCEA to do what they can to communicate the message to the general public.

The PCCEA is an organization comprised of county extension boards. Currently all 67 county boards are members at a cost of \$125 per year.

After realizing a need during the earlier 1970s, and forming an ad hoc committee in 1975, the PCCEA was formed in 1976 as a support organization for extension programs in the state. Its main goal has been to provide a concerted voice to support the state's extension program.

In literature, the organization describes its five purposes:

- To represent county extension boards in communicating their needs to administration.
- To provide guidance and advice to Penn State so that extension will function most effectively to improve the quality of life in Pennsylvania.

• To develop communications between the dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and the council concerning its resources.

• To speak to county boards in matters dealing with state or national concerns affecting cooperative extension.

• To keep the public informed of the nature and function of cooperative extension and to promote and support its programs and policies.

Other speakers at the annual meeting included James Starling, interim dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences, who gave a general address about the state of affairs for the College and Extension; Benjamin Nolt Jr., an Extension assistant in the Department of Agriculture and Extension Education, who provided a brief overview of the goals of the 4-H extension program and its hands-on learning and skill development approach; and Michelle Rodgers, assistant regional director for the Extension's Southeast Region, who talked about the benefits of Extension in community affairs and in helping families through educational services and individual help.

Along with 210 PCCEA members who attended the meeting, 25 county commissioners also were present.

County commissioners are encouraged to attend the meeting to find out more about the group and some of the challenges that face Extension.

County government has played a major role in supporting county Extension programs, which were created and continue to operate to provide hands-on educational ser-

vices, reference sources and direction to those seeking self-improvement in skills or knowledge.

In his talk, Interim Dean Starling said the College is going through a transition and is not as strong as he would like it to be, because of the cutbacks.

However, he said that he was proud of what the College does have to offer.

Citing a former dean who became president of the Kellogg Foundation, Starling said that it has been observed that the future of all colleges and universities will depend upon their responsiveness to, and interaction with, the community for which it is to serve. "That's what Extension has been doing," he said.

He gave many examples of how Extension has been helping individuals and businesses and communities, such as promoting and providing support and expertise with conservation tillage, manure management, integrated pest management, and other critical issues to the community that helps make communities and people self-sufficient and improve the quality of their lives.

He talked about how IPM educational support helped reduce pesticide use by 80 percent in Mercer County without reducing crop yields; how Palmyra Bologna Co. sought and received help to develop a strong working Hazard Critical Control Program (HCCP) in response to a problem experienced in food quality; and how Extension helped develop a Teens and

Greens program in Pittsburgh that provides an opportunity for troubled youth to gain self-confidence and develop a trusting community relationship through a street-tree care program that was able continue into a flowers and vegetable growing program after funding dried up.

Starling also noted the 55 satellite downlink sites already installed across the state through Extension and the other sites set to be installed.

Starling also talked about the tenuous position the College is in with funding.

"It is probably the most critical now," he said, noting that since 1991 funding for the college has been flat or decreased.

In that time the college lost 160 positions at counties and at University Park, the Penn State main campus.

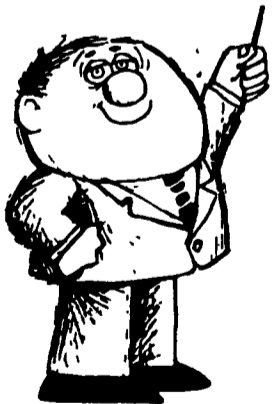
He said it has had a negative impact. "Despite the quality (of educational opportunities and support to the community the College) is slowly bleeding to death," he said.

Starling said that Spanier understands this and has been fighting to secure enough funding support to stem the flow.

The graduated and undergraduate student body is strong at 3,200, a 5-percent increase over last year and a 52-percent increase since 1990. The college has the largest undergraduate student body in the Big 10 and is continuing to grow.

The College has a scholarship program totalling \$700,000 cov-

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