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Global in Our Backyard

Barbara G. Ludwig

The Ohio State University, ludwig.2@osu.edu



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Global in Our Backyard

Abstract

Extension faculty function in a political arena and should be politically active in Extension issues and budgets. Extension faculty and administrators each have a role in providing reliable information on issues and budgets to elected officials. Extension administration should provide plans and budgets to faculty and expect them to work with elected officials as well as inform clientele and support groups. Communication between all levels of Extension becomes extremely critical. There are pitfalls, but the rewards can be a stable or higher Extension budget.

Barbara G. Ludwig

Professor and Chair
Department of Extension
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Internet Address: ludwig.2@osu.edu

Today the world is changing faster than it ever has before. We see evidence in news reports and in our own lives. Sometimes these changes can seem overwhelming. Change can also be promising and exciting as we look at problems in a way that empowers us to do something about them.

As a long-time Extension employee and educator, I've seen our job as helping people understand alternatives, the social and economic costs of interventions and likelihood of success. We work to create programs that help people improve their lives. One constant throughout my career and the career changes I've made is my interest in internationalization of Extension and higher education.

I see wonderful opportunities ahead of us to contribute to the changes that will be happening around the world. In our College, we have a special commitment to our Extension clientele across the state and our students on all campuses to help them develop a global perspective. This is echoed in words of the draft 21st Century Report (ECOP, 2001) that talks about the "changing faces of America" and explains how "globalization touches every American." The new millennium brings new challenges. This will include bringing disciplinary backgrounds to bear in international and local settings.

Three Examples

At a state Extension advisory committee the last week in January, we were discussing Extension and research programming and what we should emphasize to elected officials and state leaders. Not present on the initial list of top 10 topics was any item related to global or international. Not surprising, you might say. A team of clientele looking at agricultural priorities suggested we should highlight what we are doing related to global markets. The dynamics of developing countries, markets, and management of uncertainty is a reality for our agricultural leaders. Extension professionals will find themselves challenged and pushed by those on the cutting edge to become more skilled at integrating global concepts into local programming. We may see this trend first in the economics of trade, but it is true in other areas as well.

Purdue University last fall focused its annual Extension conference on globalization. I had a chance to listen to Extension educators during breakout sessions. They talked of the barriers that exist of time, money to travel, and concerns about what clientele will think. They also expressed uncertainty about where international fits with all the other priorities they hear about from Extension leaders. These barriers are no different from those identified by agents in Ohio and Arizona (Ludwig, 1999; Knight, Elliot, & Krenzer, 1999) or by Extension directors (Ludwig, 2000). Purdue Extension staff also talked about changes in perspective that happen as a result of travel.

One specialist indicated, "Once you've gone to a foreign country you see things differently when you return . . . and do different kinds of programming." Another added, "It's humbling how much we can learn as we travel."

Mary Lynn Thalheimer, who is responsible for Ohio State's 4-H International Program cited some of the best teachable moments she has observed. With her permission, I share them here.

- One Ohio teen turned on a battery-operated fan after hiking with the group to the top of a mountain in Costa Rica, only to turn it off after seeing an elderly peasant farmer climbing the same hill with a load of sticks on his back.
- An Ohio family agreed to host a Japanese "special needs" child and remarked after Mary Lynn explained his disability, "He has no arms? That's the disability you were nervous to tell us about? Whew, we thought there was a really SERIOUS problem."
- An Ohio teen was sent to Estonia through the 4-H International Program, fell in love, got married a few years ago, now lives there, and recently recruited 15 Estonian families to host a group of Ohio youth visiting that newly opened country.
- A Jewish Ohio family recently asked about hosting a German exchangee next year, because, in their words, "it's time" (Thalheimer, 2002).

It Is Time . . .

Our vision of international Extension is growing beyond the concept of Extension educators having an assignment to work in a developing country. There is an awareness of the need to help clientele look at issues related to the environment, the global marketplace, health and wellness, and how we use technology from a global perspective. I recently heard a wonderful example: think about the speed of the stagecoach versus a train, a car, or a rocket ship. We moved through those technologies in fewer than 150 years. Now, think about what the future will bring as other technological breakthroughs occur.

We are living in a very small world and can't isolate ourselves from what's happening around the globe. Mad cow and hoof and mouth disease in Europe had an impact on local county fairs. September 11th taught us still other lessons.

The events of the past months raise our awareness of that connection. By mid-century, it is predicted that the average U.S. citizen will trace his or her ancestry not to Europe, but to Asia, Africa, the Hispanic world, or the Pacific Islands. Global is becoming a part of local, and education and support for clientele will have to be delivered within a culturally sensitive framework.

Cross-cultural competency will make Extension professionals more effective locally and also open to them the possibility of personal professional growth through involvement in a project or study tour. "I learned if you go to a foreign country where you don't speak the language, speaking more loudly doesn't help," remarked an agent following his first trip. Ask anyone who has traveled, and you will hear a story.

A Worldwide Network

For those of us working for Extension in the U.S., it is important to remember that we are part of a web of Extension professionals located around the globe who are also reaching out to a broader community where shifting priorities demand new approaches. In the United States, land-grant universities have Extension outreach functions. In other parts of the world, the connection between the university and advisory (Extension) service providers are less formal, and Extension is viewed as a process.

Last fall I participated in a European Seminar on Extension Education (ESEE) that focused on sustainable development. The experience challenged my perspectives and increased my appreciation of the work we have ahead. The issues faced by Extension professionals range from safe food and water supplies to contested land use and the loss of viability in rural communities. An aging population, housing issues, and desire for financial security don't end at the borders of North America.

There is an organization called AIAEE, the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education, based here in the U.S. whose annual meeting brings together Extension professionals from across the globe. The organization has a Web site <http://ag.arizona.edu/aiaee/> and publishes a newsletter <http://ag.arizona.edu/aiaee/newslett.htm> and a journal <http://ag.arizona.edu/aiaee/Journal.htm>. The presentations made by conference participants and networking that is an inherent part of the conference offer great personal and professional experiences.

This year's conference will be held in Durban, South Africa, but 2003 finds participants gathering in Raleigh, North Carolina. Consider AIAEE or other organizations that involve international participants to learn more about current issues affecting all Extension professionals as well as innovative teaching and technology approaches.

Gaining International Experience

Mark Twain wrote: *Travel is fatal to prejudices, bigotry and narrow-mindedness. . . . Broad, wholesome, charitable views of (human beings) and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one corner of the earth all of one's lifetime.*

Not everyone will have the opportunity to travel, but through participation in organizations and conferences, visiting Web sites, and reading journals horizons can be expanded. Other approaches are as simple as offering to host international visitors. Inviting a visiting graduate student who is an Extension professional in another country to spend a day in the county and participate in an Extension advisory committee would be a good start. The visitor gets to see democracy in action, and advisory committee members begin to learn about similar problems and aspirations. Involving clientele in study tours, finding out about sister city projects, or volunteering to assist with a short-term international development project are other approaches.

Most universities offer a variety of study abroad programs, but many youth going to college never see this as a possibility for them. Inviting local college students who have participated in study abroad to talk with older 4-H youth and parents about what they've gained is a wonderful starting point. International study abroad and internship programs encourage the exchange of ideas, build lasting friendships, and give graduates an advantage when job hunting.

Closing Thoughts

In the 1980's and 1990's, the concepts of international Extension and developing countries were always linked. In the winter of 1985, the Editor's Page in the *Journal of Extension (JOE)* <http://www.joe.org/joe/1985winter/ed1.html> commented on the need for "international Extension." Roger Lawrence talked about the dilemma he felt as the editor in how to respond to articles submitted from developing countries about work in those countries. There was a desire to recognize the creative and productive work being done, but an understanding that for the majority of readers what was happening elsewhere in the world was not their focus.

A new challenge exists for the editors and contributors of our journal in 2002. Thanks to its electronic distribution, *JOE* has already become an international journal read and used by professionals around the world. I hope we are growing to see that international Extension exists in everyone's backyard and that *JOE* can provide a forum for exchanging ideas that improve the ability of Extension professionals to be responsive to local issues that have global impact and to global issues that require local action.

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Discussion

Author: [Bruce Wilkins](#)

A useful message for many. Thanks for this opportunity to see an apparetly well functining discussion area.

Date: 2/25/2002

Author: [Kevin](#)

If someone you knew were intent on starting a career with CES, what would you tell them.

Date: 4/10/2002

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