

Closure of a CMG County-Based Program

Modified and approved by CMGLC, August, 27, 2009

Guiding Principles Governing Decisions

Cross County Programming – In both the urban and rural areas of the state, the Extension Horticulture Program including the CMG Program extensively practices cross-county programming. This is a normal mode of operation between neighboring counties and states. It flows freely without formal planning or structure. It is mutually beneficial to both parties, with both parties providing and receiving services. Concerns arise when one party is only a receiver of services.

Carrying Capacity – County Extension Programs operate at local carrying capacity; that is staff time resources are typically over-extended providing a variety of services and program to local residence. Responding to cross-county inquiries is a normal mode of operations. However flags go up when services to out-of-county residence begin to significantly diminish the total services provided to county residence. For example, answering a few out-of-county phone calls is not a concern as this is a normal mode of operations. However in the event that a county stops providing services, shifting hundreds to thousands of phone calls (and other contacts) to neighboring counties is unacceptable due to carrying capacity of the neighboring county staff resources.

Volunteers Leadership – CMG volunteers are highly passionate about their outreach service and training as an Extension Volunteer. As part of our service agreement, Extension provides each volunteer with an Extension Professional as their in-line supervisor to 1) provide technical support in horticulture subject matter and 2)

coordinate volunteer outreach and learning opportunities. The extent of staffing required at the local level to supervise volunteer activities depends on the number of volunteers in a local program and the magnitude of outreach efforts. This is the role of the Extension Professional (agents and Horticulture/CMG Program Assistants).

It is unacceptable for volunteers or a program assistant to be freewheeling without a direct line of local supervision, accountability, and technical support.

It is unrealistic to expect a volunteer program to operate without local on-going supervision from Extension Professionals. County and State officials need to understand and value that it requires staff time to supervise and provide technical horticultural support to volunteers.

Cooperative Extension Partnership – Extension is a partnership between the county, state and federal levels of governments. In Colorado, the county is the primary financial funder of Extension programs. Thus if a county elects not to fund Extension Programs, services to county residents should be distinctly different from residents in partnership counties. Otherwise, it gives the message that the county's contribution to the partnership is not essential.

Statements that all residents of the state (as state and federal taxpayers) receive the same services from Extension does not hold county commissioners (and local tax payers) accountable for their role in the partnership.

Extension Administration needs to provide the leadership to clarify service levels for residents in partnership and non-partnership counties. Shifting of services to neighboring counties is not acceptable due to the carrying capacity of counties.

Nearly half of the CMG staff are paid solely from county funds. Extension programs need to value and honor the county's contribution and commitment in providing services to county residents. As mentioned above, cross-county programming is a normal mode of operations in a give-and-take type of operation.

Extension programs need to acknowledge county ownership of staff time and services and not expect one county to fund the services provided to another county (without outlining the give-and-take of multi-county work).

Uniformity Between Programs – All Extension programs (including 4-H and Colorado Master Gardener) need to have the same policies regarding out-of-county participation. Otherwise, programs work on a double standard.

Recommendations on handling the closure of a County CMG Program

Discussions around the closure of a county Extension Programs need to be transparent. CSU Extension needs to pressure county commissioners to be open and transparent in their discussions. Discussions need to be inclusive of CMG volunteers. Currently in Weld and El Paso Counties, we have many angry CMG Volunteers who feel betrayed by Extension and left uninformed about program issues.

Continuing a CMG Program under volunteer leadership but without on-going supervision by Extension Professionals is not acceptable. Programs need a strong direct link to the research-based and to procedural expectations of Extension.

Just like paid staff, volunteers work “at will” of the University. Jobs may be eliminated due to budget constraints or other program priorities.

In the event that a county elects to end funding for Extension program in the county, CMG volunteers will be “released” from volunteer service. All CMG Program outreach efforts and training ends. This should be clearly communicated to CMG volunteers in an open and inclusive manner by the county Extension staff and Regional Directors.

The title “Colorado Master Gardener” is a registered service mark of CSU Extension and is used to identify volunteers (non-paid staff) representing CSU Extension. Thus “released” volunteers must avoid continued use of the title “Colorado Master Gardener”. To represent their training and experience, Extension encouraged released volunteers to continue using the title “Colorado Gardener Certificate”. The term “master gardener” is used by many organizations and while discouraging its use, Extension does not oppose its use as long as it is not used in context with Extension programs.

An ending event for volunteers may be appropriate, thanking the volunteers for the past service.

Released CMG volunteers from counties that end funding support for Extension may not transfer to neighboring counties. This holds County Commissioners accountable for their budget decisions and honors the funding support of neighboring counties.