



EDUCATIONAL ROLES OF COUNTY EXTENSION EDUCATORS AT COUNTY FAIRS

Cooperative Extension Guidelines

May 2012

Introduction

The University of Wisconsin System has a three-fold mission in resident instruction, research and extension. In 1973, and again in 1982, the UW Board of Regents affirmed the historic commitment of all its institutions to public service and the public good. Concurrent with this reaffirmation was the assignment of the University of Wisconsin-Extension to lead, coordinate, plan and administer the extension function of the UW System.

Faculty and staff from throughout the UW System are often called upon to offer their academic expertise in specialized fields and to assist state and local agencies and groups to plan and execute events. Examples of these types of activity include providing expert testimony to the state legislature and policy formulation or statistical analysis for state and local government units. These and similar activities extend the education role of university educators to serve the public good.

The role of all extension educators working in county and regional settings is education. Extension educators are often the first point of contact with the University of Wisconsin System for people throughout the state. Extension educators teach, learn, lead and serve connecting people with the University of Wisconsin, and engaging with them in transforming lives and communities. The educational purpose is accomplished in many ways – through seminars, workshops, information meetings, tours, demonstrations, exhibits, field studies, teleconferencing, Facebook, twitter, web sites, publications, and the mass media, both public and commercial. Extension educators work with personnel from other agencies, organizations, institutions and elected bodies to develop educational programs and provide professional expertise based on the research and knowledge foundation base of the University. Extension educators are also charged with upholding the integrity, policies and guidelines of UW-Extension and Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Program.

The Role of Extension Educators in County Fairs

Over the years UW-Extension has demonstrated its strong support for county fairs. This is appropriate because county fairs can offer numerous educational opportunities for participants and the general public. Participating in the fair also provides extension educators an opportunity for relationship building and interaction with the public. Fairs have also added a special dimension and focus to a variety of educational programs involving individuals of all ages as well as local organizations.

In some counties, extension educators were asked to coordinate and/or direct part of or all of the county fair operation. However, this is outside of the educational role of educators of the University of Wisconsin System.

Regional Directors, in cooperation with County oversight Committees, will review the roles and responsibilities of educators. Increasing and strengthening the involvement of local residents in planning and conducting county fairs will help the fairs achieve their goals as major educational, cultural, economic and social events in the lives of people.

There is a need for extension educators across program areas, to work closely with county fairs, whether the county fair is an official county event, or sponsored by a private organization. However, it is the responsibility of UW-Extension administration and individual educators to monitor the job descriptions and day-to-day responsibilities of educators to ensure that services provided to county fairs are directly related to specific educational goals.

Adequate clerical staff ought to be employed by county fair organizations specifically to assist with fair responsibilities, so that support for ongoing extension programs can be maintained without disruption. We expect county extension educators to focus on educational roles at county fairs. Examples of these educational roles include:

1. Coordinating training for fair board members and superintendents, particularly in the areas of decision-making, leadership and organization.
2. Instructing volunteer leaders in how to conduct a demonstration, prepare an exhibit, improve displays or supervise others.
3. Teaching at workshops, demonstrations or exhibits at the county fair.
4. Providing advice and counsel to fair boards and managers, and advising various fair committees to ensure that the educational dimension of the fair are strengthened. Members of the county extension staff may serve as a non-voting representative to the fair governing board. Examples of advisory roles:
 - Advisement on the development of job descriptions for paid and volunteer leaders working directly with the fair board;
 - Advising the fair society and various fair committees on state premium list recommendations;
 - Advising on publicity, promotion and display arrangements;
 - Advising on selection and scheduling of judges and training and evaluation of judges.
5. Serving as a judge in other counties to further enhance learning experiences for fair participants. As a paid judge educators are expected to use vacation time.

Administration or organizational roles in connection with county fairs are **not appropriate** for county extension agents. Examples of such inappropriate roles include:

1. Serving as fair secretary or manager or superintendent.
2. Serving as a voting member of the fair board.
3. Booking or contracting for carnivals or other entertainment.
4. Scheduling or supervising the maintenance and upkeep of the fairgrounds or its buildings.
5. Handling fair receipts and/or disbursements, or selling tickets at the fair.
6. Employing paid personnel for the fair, including fair judges.