

Green and Growing

Written by D. Bruce Bosley, CSU Extension Agent/Cropping Systems

Oct. 1 was a milestone for Extension in Colorado. On this date 100 years ago, Logan County hired the first Farm Management Extension Agent, D.C. Bascom.

El Paso County Commissioners had been the first to authorize funding for Extension in early September 1912. They had authorized Extension funding to pay half the salary and expenses of the State's first "agricultural expert" through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's new Extension system.

However, Logan County Commissioners and stakeholders realized the potential value of this program and moved quickly to hire the first Agricultural Extension Agent. El Paso County hired the second Extension Agent 16 days later. Such rivalries and competition between counties were prevalent then and are the norm still today.

From the first year of its founding in 1879, Colorado Agricultural College, now Colorado State University, had conducted Farmer Institute programs across the state. Colorado's Ag College had also initiated "Boys & Girls Clubs" programs in 1910.

Youth in these clubs tested the fit of crop seed varieties under Colorado's growing conditions. This program became the foundation of Extension's 4-H program.

As the state's first county agent, D.C. Bascom toiled with a missionary-like zeal to assist rural Coloradans. Club organization, short courses, field demonstrations and a traveling library represented part of his duties. His schedule was vigorous, visiting farmers by day and attending meetings by night.

Personal contact commended his highest priority. Bascom continually toured the county, at first "via team and buggy" and later in a four-passenger Buick.

In one year's work, Bascom reported that he had traveled nearly 14,000 miles and written more than 1,200 personal letters.

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During these visits to individual farms and ranches, Bascom observed both good and bad agricultural practices where he offered useful suggestions.

Especially appreciated was his traveling library of books and bulletins that farm families could borrow until he returned on subsequent visits.

He held "field meetings" for on-site demonstrations of improved farming techniques.

These had as many as 115 attendees who, following an adventurous ride in borrowed automobiles, would be shown what scientific farm management practices might offer. At that time crop failures were common in dryland farming.

At one dryland field meeting, innovative moisture saving summer tillage techniques were demonstrated. This proved persuasive for many dryland farmers. Their yield averages went from less than 10 to more than 28 bushels per acre.

Bascom believed that rural people should be actively involved in defining their own concerns and in developing appropriate methods for addressing them. Consequently, he spent much time hosting meetings and establishing farmer's organizations.

Among these, he encouraged the establishment of women's clubs and sought help from Wilburta Knight, a home economics teacher at Logan County High School.

Several homemaker clubs were formed and soon began projects involving fruit and vegetable canning and home nursing. He also made a special effort to provide interesting speakers and recreational diversion at farm club meetings.

One of his most successful accomplishments was the establishment of "Boys & Girls clubs."

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During a five-week farmer's short course in 1913 he scheduled classes on cooking and sewing, farm accounts, grain judging and blacksmithing. He also conducted a milk-testing service to aid dairy farmers in keeping accurate records of butterfat productivity.

He supervised extensive silo construction and soil draining projects. He coordinated a farmer's exchange where better communication was fostered between sellers and buyers of agricultural commodities. He established pest control districts. They proved highly effective in combatting a grasshopper infestation in 1913.

Other localities followed Logan County to obtain Extension Agents: El Paso, Pueblo, Mesa, Boulder, Morgan and Prowers counties and the San Luis Valley. Geographical peculiarities mandated differences in the programs emphasized, and financial arrangements varied from place to place.

For the most part though, Extension methods used in Logan County were followed.

D.C. Bascom's legacy is that northeastern Colorado counties today continue to have strong Extension programs and exemplary support by government and other stakeholders.

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Holyoke Enterprise October 4, 2012