

Extension Agriculture Programs In Transition

URBANA, ILL.

University of Illinois Extension's commercial agriculture programs will see some big changes in 2011, when the organization's remaining crops and livestock Educators will relocate to six U of I research stations around the State.

When producers need non-commercial, research-based answers they can trust, Extension's commercial agriculture Educators and Specialists still will be there to help, according to Robert Hoeft, the U of I's Interim Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach.

But how they deliver that help will change with the times.

"We'll still do newsletters and meetings, but some of them will be done on more of a regional or statewide basis," Hoeft said. "And just as technology is changing the way people farm, technology will give us more options for providing up-to-the-minute recommendations for producers" through blogs, online courses, the U of I's distance-diagnostics system and other means.

"Today there are so many Certified Crop Advisors and consultants in the private sector who make farm visits and do some of the other things local Extension advisers did 20 or 30 years ago," he said. "We had to make a decision about how best to use limited resources, and the decision was to allow our Educators to concentrate on conducting applied research and reducing the lag time between important discoveries and their application in the field."

Hoeft, a long-time Extension soil-fertility specialist, said the corn, soybean and livestock producers he talks with today generally are much better educated than the producers he served when he started with Extension 37 years

ago.

"Most have had college-level coursework in agronomy or animal sciences. They run sophisticated businesses. They work with CCAs, accountants and other professionals. And most have gotten pretty comfortable seeking information online, whether it's from the U of I, Iowa State, Ohio State or wherever they can find the most up-to-date information that's relevant to their operations.

"We're all part of the same Land-Grant University family, and it no longer makes sense for every University to hire full-time faculty or Educators in every sub-specialty," he said. "States all over the Midwest are reconfiguring their Extension programs to meet the most critical needs with limited resources, and we're all collaborating more with colleagues in other states."

Hoeft said the commercial agriculture (crops and livestock) Educators will work closely with Campus-based faculty and Extension specialists, as well as their Agricultural Experiment Station colleagues at the University's research farms.

In addition to the commercial agriculture Educators who specialize in crops or livestock, Extension's agriculture and natural resources (ANR) program staff will include several new Educators who concentrate on small farms and local food production. Other Extension ANR Educators will focus on horticulture or environmental stewardship and energy.

"As always, our goal is to work together to help keep Illinois' number-one industry strong and sustainable," Hoeft said.

"How we do that in the future will be very different than it's been in the past." Δ



Link Directly To: **AGRIGOLD**



Link Directly To: **PIONEER**