

Local Sources of Extension Funding and South Carolina

Nationally, extension programs are funded by a combination of federal, state, and local funds. Although economic conditions and political shifts drive funding change at all three levels, state funding is usually the most volatile sector. Therefore, it is likely that local funding will be increasingly important for ensuring the stability and success of extension programs in South Carolina (Clemson Extension and South Carolina State 1890).

A cursory review of local funding practices reveals that local governments in South Carolina provide less funding than other southeastern states. For this review, local funding data was collected for ten counties across South Carolina by members of the State Extension Advisory Council’s Research Subcommittee. Information was requested from local extension offices by subcommittee members; a summary is presented in Table 1. In addition, brief questionnaires were distributed to extension staff in other states; representatives from extension services in Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, and Virginia responded. Information from these states is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Local Funding of Extension in South Carolina Counties.

County	Donation	Positions Funded	Overall Contribution
Aiken	Office Space/Utilities/\$4000 for Expenses		
Bamberg	Office Space/\$1100 for Expenses		
Barnwell	Office Space/\$500 for Expenses		
Berkeley	Office Space/Operational	Partial FT Ag Agent	9.4%
Edgefield	Office Space/\$2500 for Expenses		
Charleston	Office Space	PT Adopt-A-Hwy	8.3%
Dorchester	Office Space/Operational	Partial FT Ag Agent	13%
Lexington	Office Space/Utilities		
McCormick	Office/Storage Space & Expenses	1 FT 4-H Agent (50%)	
Sumter	Office Space/\$16,693 Expenses	County: 2 Partial FT City: 1 Partial FT	

Local government funding for extension programs in South Carolina is obviously variable from county to county. Aside from the fact that this source of funding makes up a smaller

percentage of overall funding in South Carolina, it also appears that extension programs in the state suffer from lack of a local funding plan. Such plans vary in other states; they range from buildings and a flat percentage to support extension staff salaries (Louisiana and Virginia), to minimum rates based on office staffing (Arkansas, Georgia, and Texas), to more complex strategies (Kentucky has a 5-tier county assessment level upon which minimum rates are based). However, for the states which provided more detailed information regarding local funding requirements, it appears that local funding was significantly greater than in South Carolina: more than 33% of total funding in Virginia, and more than 25% of total funding in Louisiana.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Having reviewed local funding data in South Carolina and from other southeastern states, a few conclusions may be drawn which shed light on the relative lack of local funding for extension in the state.

- Local funding for extension in South Carolina is less than in other states, and it appears to vary dramatically across the state.
- Local funding for extension in South Carolina appears to suffer for lack of a local funding plan.

With these conclusions in mind, the Research Subcommittee makes the following general recommendations:

- The Extension Service should develop a local funding plan (LFP), perhaps with assistance from the State Extension Advisory Committee.
- In order to facilitate development of such an LFP, statewide data on local funding should be considered so that funding may be analyzed on a consistent basis, tabulated, and provided to local governments for comparison to trends in South Carolina and across the southeast. This document, in part or in whole, may provide a useful starting point.
- The LFP may be either voluntary or mandatory; in either case, implementation should be gradual and transparent, with increased local funding requests or requirements over time. The Research Subcommittee believes that it would be preferable for adherence to the LFP to be voluntary, at least at first. If the LFP is mandatory, a good deal of advanced notice should be provided to local governments.
- In addition, Extension should develop and provide current cost:benefit data to help make the case for increased local funding. Preferably, this data should be provided on a statewide and a county-by-county, or at least regional, basis. This information is necessary whether adherence to an LFP is voluntary or mandatory, and it will need to be kept up to date on a regular basis to support continued funding.

- The LFP should be simple, but it should also acknowledge diversity in county resources and requirements across South Carolina. This would provide for flexibility for smaller or poorer counties. In addition, required Extension support in urban counties is different from in rural counties. Without adding a great deal of complexity, two to three tiers of local funding support could be designed to recognize differences in resources and needs among South Carolina counties, thus smoothing acceptance of the LFP. This possibility should be reviewed before the LFP is finalized.
- The LFP should allow for creative approaches to local funding, including but not limited to combined funding from counties, municipalities, and school districts; private sources of funding; and regional, rather than county-by-county, approaches to funding.
- Regardless of the details of the LFP itself, local advocacy will need to increase, and be actively supported by Extension itself by providing cost:benefit data, promotional materials, etc. This is true regardless of whether adherence to the LFP is voluntary or mandatory.