

Action Items

Elevating, Amplifying, and Accelerating Extension Climate Change Actions

Introduction:

The National Extension Climate Initiative (NECI) hosted a three-day virtual forum April 19-21, 2021 with the express purpose of “Elevating and Amplifying [Climate Change] Action” across the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). On Day 1, “Setting the Stage,” representatives from USDA, NIFA, ECOP, and Sea Grant shared their visions for unified national Extension climate change action. On Day 2, “Digging Deeper,” we heard from Extension Directors from across the United States (US). On the final day, the focus shifted to identifying concrete actions that NECI and CES can (and should) take to improve and accelerate the impacts of our collective climate change Extension work. The purpose of these actions is to leverage the extensive trusted network of CES researchers, educators, and community engaged professionals to dramatically increase climate change literacy and accelerate the implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation across the United States.

We (the NECI Steering Committee and members) organized and refined the list of actions and priorities identified during the forum, and drafted key takeaways to apply across the Extension system:

- Extension is well positioned to advance and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation. CES is widely trusted by a diversity of communities and stakeholders as a source of credible information, has a vast network of personnel embedded in communities in nearly every county in the US, and *we have strong foundations and well-established relationships from which to build.*
- We are committed to doing this climate change Extension work in a manner that *actively leverages and builds upon existing assets and strengths* (capacity, capital, and content) while continuously working to fill existing gaps and resource needs.
- The *current scale and scope of resources (time, talents, and treasure) dedicated to support climate Extension work is far from sufficient.* To move actions forward in a unified, coordinated, and efficient manner, *significant additional commitments and investments are necessary,* particularly from within CES but also from new partnerships.
- CES has a *strong but limited portfolio of existing climate programs and trained educators to deliver climate education and outreach initiatives.* More *targeted and focused program development is needed* to fill these significant program gaps.
- NECI’s existing vision statement describes the future we aim to create for CES and our climate work. In pursuit of this vision, *we will form subcommittees for actions that NECI can advance.* *For needs and priorities that require system-wide leadership, buy-in, and investments at scale, the NECI Steering Committee will continue to discuss and strategically advocate for internal and external support.*

The list of action items below provides the scaffolding and a starting point for comprehensive action to advance Extension climate change work quickly and decisively. With NECI Steering Committee guidance, subcommittees will work to refine specific details of who, what, when, where, and how action items are prioritized and implemented. The following NECI subcommittees are proposed:

1. Partnerships & Policy
2. Professional, Program & Curriculum Development
3. Climate Justice
4. Communications & Marketing
5. Accountability & Evaluation

1) Create and Promote a Unified National Climate Extension Vision and Strategic Plan

- Develop, adopt, and promote a national climate change vision statement, cohesive branding, and messaging for Extension (setting priorities and social equity mechanisms) - model off of NECI Vision Statement
- Develop a template set/tool of Extension climate change goals supported by specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound (SMART) objectives that state Extension systems can use
- Be the portal for climate change Extension materials by compiling, cataloging, providing existing climate change curricula (at Climate Hubs/The Extension Foundation), and identifying and securing resources to produce new needed curricula
- Develop a climate change ready and resilient CES able to create cohesive, cross-disciplinary Extension programs to increase the capacity of communities/clientele to address climate change. Improve willingness to act throughout the system and increase accountability for State Extension administrators and colleagues. Make climate change programming part of all Extension educators' plans of work and evaluations to increase accountability
- Encourage universities to restructure traditional Extension programming around areas more relevant to today's issues and population. Identify and adopt strategies to weave climate justice into research, extension, and community service; and to increase diversity, equity, and representation [in both ways of gaining and sharing]; and co-generating information and in personnel (up and down the hierarchy)
- Encourage land grant universities/administration to support climate programming by identifying or designating (and funding) state-level Extension specialists/faculty points of contact. Facilitate fair compensation/promotion for those engaged in interdisciplinary climate change work, moving away from the siloed nature of traditional programming and incentives

2) Strengthen and Expand Extension's Internal Infrastructure (Capacity, Capital, Content)

- Hire FTEs to 1. assess state-by-state Extension climate change programming and impacts of those efforts (building on the work of our 2020 climate/extreme weather fellowship), 2. track and map which states are making changes and which ones are not and what programming and

positions are being offered and where, 3. conduct a national needs assessment of what major stakeholders want/need to know with regards to climate change, and 4. house climate change resources in an easily accessible and centrally located area

- Form NECI subcommittees to help ensure action items are carried out
- Promote NECI membership
- Discover what other major organizations are doing in terms of professional development (4-H, etc.)
- Work with Journal of Extension to devote a full annual issue to climate programming
- Work with state and university leaders nationally to incentivize/mandate climate trainings at state Extension conferences, as part of promotion, reporting, or other venues
- Hold national Extension Climate Change conferences and/or regional conferences/meetings between existing and potential federal partners (USDA NIFA, Climate Hubs, Forest Service, NOAA, EPA, EDEN, HUD, DOE, HHS, Defense, State, and other relevant federal agencies) and state Extension employees
- Improve internal and external communication (the messages themselves and the messaging) - newsletters, meetings - some way to effectively improve communications about what is going on
- Be intentional about recruitment in Extension to increase educator and administrator diversity
- Empower allyship in Extension

3) Strengthen and Expand Extension's External Infrastructure (Capacity, Capital, Content)

- Identify and clearly communicate what Extension brings to partnerships at city, county, tribal, state, and national levels, such as community level relationships, expertise in science communication and co-generation of solutions
- Strengthen existing - and identify and develop new - relationships, partnerships, and pathways, including those with foundations, agencies, and the private sector, to leverage and expand current work on climate change
- Work to ensure partners have genuine agency/influence in Extension climate decisions
- Develop a framework for tailoring climate change programming to local communities' specific situations, cultures, socio-economic factors, and environmental conditions. Shift away from information delivery and exchange and toward co-creating and launching climate change programs with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities

4) Expand Youth and Community/Citizen Climate Literacy and Competency

- Enable and grow citizen science/climate corps, including a youth corps, who understand climate change and can advise on meaningful local mitigation strategies. Meet with NIFA NPL for 4-H to find out what the opportunities are and the processes to do this
- Facilitate inter-generational learning and engage underserved/BIPOC communities
- Partner with other climate movements for youth, communities, and professionals

- Create adaptable frameworks to implement action items across multiple public-facing Extension Master Programs (see existing climate stewards programs for adults in CA, NY)
- Design national climate change professional development competencies and communities of practice/certification courses *specific to Extension*: basic science, interpreting climate data, climate justice, and climate communications. (e.g., modeled after National Association of Climate Change Officers / Certified Climate Professionals/UC Climate Stewards trainings)

5) Be the Trusted Advisor to Help Communities Adopt Climate Change Adaptation & Mitigation Solutions

- Conduct research and training to increase community capacity to understand major sources and sinks of greenhouse gases. Research and improve understanding of joint mitigation and adaptation strategies that provide co-benefits for people and nature and effective strategies in renewable energy, agroecology, agroforestry, and mitigation
- Expand knowledge and access to revenue generation from public incentive programs, ecosystem services and carbon markets, particularly for farmers, foresters, and ranchers, as a source of revenue to support agricultural and natural resource management
- Contextualize climate change in community development; Provide job transition training for rural communities

6) Organize Today for Tomorrow's Climate Disasters

- Support research to better anticipate climate change impacts on hazards and risks. Identify, create, and provide usable data for community planning and avail those plans to local jurisdictions. Identify and share best practices, and promote peer-to-peer learning
- Build capacity among Extension educators and communities on disaster preparedness and blueprints for local planning. Partner with EDEN to leverage existing resources and identify and create new resources and programming
- Extension programming focuses by-and-large on adaptation; there is fertile ground for expanding mitigation-focused programs and to advocate for resources allowing communities to build resilience