



# WHY EXTENSION ABROAD MATTERS AT HOME

## *A Fact Sheet for Extension Specialists and Leaders*

In order for U.S. universities and colleges to remain competitive and innovative forces for the greater good in a rapidly changing world, **Cooperative Extension Systems (CES)** must continue to **globalize** to serve new and more diverse audiences, provide enriching opportunities that produce global citizens, and strengthen long-term institutional capacity.

### **"... BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR COMMUNITIES AT HOME?"**

Extension educators are agents of learning, growth, and change. Our core values are founded on principles of service, leadership, self-knowledge, and open-mindedness. Our commitment to building better communities is not limited to our respective counties, states, or even country. Rather, our ability to embrace our position within a global society and build meaningful partnerships with people and institutions abroad allows us to fulfill our collective mission in today's world.

## **- WHY IT MATTERS -**

### **1. KEEPS US COMPETITIVE**

The U.S. agriculture industry has been "global" since Day One, and today almost all food systems around the world are connected. Our research and extension efforts abroad contribute towards the global fight against hunger, build new adaptive food systems for a changing climate, and create opportunities to exchange knowledge and scientific ideas – all while gaining pivotal lessons and experiences to apply at home.

For Extension leadership teams, the task of globalizing extension efforts is a strategic priority. Almost all our land-grant universities have faculty, extension specialists, and administrators conducting international research and extension programming, and teaching students abroad. The cumulative force of these efforts signals to the rest of campus, the larger community, and beyond, that these institutions are powerful global players capable of translating our expertise and experience in research, extension, and teaching anywhere in the world, on all topics related to rural development, urban farming, nutrition, youth leadership, and beyond.

These types of initiatives elevate our institutional profiles, making our campuses more attractive to prospective students, as well as faculty and extension hires. University graduates enter a world where global competencies and knowledge are increasingly in demand by employers (Heinert & Roberts 2016). Global extension efforts can be linked to study abroad programs and virtual global classrooms, and provide U.S. students with professional, exciting global opportunities in a field they might not have previously considered. For land-grant universities to remain competitive in higher education, it is essential to establish a strong global presence.

## 2. INVESTMENT IN OUR TEAMS AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

Global projects and initiatives provide meaningful professional development opportunities for our extension specialists and faculty, despite their level of international experience. These experiences both reinforce and expand upon skills honed at home, pushing our people out of their comfort zone and into challenging new growth and learning zones, increasing their effectiveness in interdisciplinary environments (Vincenti, 2001; Stevens et al. 2014).

County agents have a wide variety of skills and knowledge related to their work that can be applied and shared globally. These experiences can have an immense value and impact for them individually, as well as their larger extension units and the communities they serve. By lending expertise to a global project, both virtually and in-person, county agents advance the body of research in their field and get the chance to collaborate with new and diverse colleagues in the U.S. and with partners abroad.

The impact of travel, even if infrequent or brief, is difficult to overstate. During a mission abroad, extension staff, faculty and students reimagine and refine their cross-cultural competency skills and consider new and innovative ways of communicating information and collaborating across different stakeholders. Through travel abroad we are called to be creative and adaptive, translating skill sets in this new context – all while forming new collaborative partnerships and making a difference in some of the world’s most vulnerable communities. This experience is highly energizing. New perspectives and skills are brought back home and integrated into our extension units, and those who have the opportunity to travel internationally are better equipped to work across diverse populations within their own community, and share knowledge gained with the people they serve.

## 3. STRENGTHENS INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

Working abroad requires sophisticated systems for finance and logistics management. Whether it’s encouraging your agents to take two weeks for a Farmer-to-Farmer volunteer experience, or putting together a team to land a large-scale funded project, Cooperative Extension needs bold leadership and well-integrated infrastructure in place to support these endeavors.

To manage a multi-million-dollar USAID or USDA-funded cooperative agreement with a partner in the Global South, extension units and their administrative teams must have on deck high-quality proposal writing, strong fiscal controls (e.g., ability to pass an audit), dependable and supportive administrative systems (e.g., Offices of Research Administration), evaluation specialists, international travel coordinators, and more. Once these systems are in place and skill sets are developed, our institutions vastly increase their ability to go for even bigger grants and funding opportunities in the future – here and abroad. By expanding our network of partners around the world and forging new collaborative relationships – in both the public and private sectors – we strengthen long-term institutional capacity.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Our goal at land grant institutions is to create a transformational learning space for students *and* employees to become global citizens, capable of addressing the great challenges that face us today. Only from a collaborative global mindset will we succeed in mitigating the effects of climate change and producing new adaptive food systems, win the fight for racial and economic justice, achieve true gender equality, and protect our natural resources for future generations. From a practical, policy perspective, the U.S. benefits of international collaboration and development intersect across multiple sectors – economic, political, environmental, health, and social. Our engagement abroad means increased trade and opportunities for private sector investment, exchange of scientific ideas, improved food safety and quality, and cross-cultural awareness that leads to increased tolerance and cooperation between nations.<sup>1</sup> And most importantly, we are working to build a better world for future generations of producers and consumers.

<sup>1</sup> Radomski, 2002

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

“Global Education: What is It? Why Should You Care?” (International Extension Curriculum: Strengthening Extension’s Capacity for International Engagement, written by Carol Radomski for USDA/CSREES/International Programs, 2002)

<https://ag.purdue.edu/ipia/Documents/International%20Extension%20Curriculum/2Global%20Education%20intro%20Radomski.pdf>

“The Code of Ethics” (National Association County Agricultural Agents, 2021)

<https://www.nacaa.com/about/code.php>

“Ten Guiding Values of Extension Education” (North Dakota State University)

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/orientation/communication/ten-guiding-values-of-extension-education>

The Farmer-to-Farmer Program

<https://farmer-to-farmer.org/>

Heinert, S. and Roberts, T. (2016). Globalizing the Undergraduate Experience in Agricultural Leadership, Education, Extension, and Communication. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Vol. 57, pp. 42-55.

Stevens, G., Smith, B., and A. Downing. (2014). International Study Abroad Experiences with Agents and Students: A Case Study in Belize. *Journal of Extension*, V. 52, N. 1., Article #1FEA10.

Vincenti, V. B. (2001). Exploration of the relationship between international experiences and the interdisciplinary work of university faculty. 2001. *Journal of Science in International Education*, 5, 42-63.