People’s challenges change through the years, and Cooperative Extension keeps modifying educational programs to remain vibrant for the next 100 years.

Cooperative Extension’s first agent, E.L. Luther, was hired in February 1912 to help farmers in Oneida County remove stumps from their land to prepare for farming in the North. Today, Cooperative Extension works with people, families, farms, businesses and communities, applying university knowledge and research to address issues in rural, suburban and urban settings. Locally-based Cooperative Extension staff collaborates with University of Wisconsin campus specialists to provide educational programming in Wisconsin’s 72 counties and within three tribal nations.

FAMILY LIVING PROGRAMS
The first family living educators overcame huge obstacles to deliver educational programs throughout the state, as they packed their trunk with demonstration materials, and set off for four-to six-week tours.

Today the challenges are different, but Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs’ commitment and responsiveness to the needs of Wisconsin families remains the same. Campus- and county-based educators, specialists and nutrition colleagues provide evidence-informed education and resources throughout the state on topics that are important to families – a safe and healthy food supply, financial security and family relationships. Family Living helps communities explore responses to critical issues and strives to ensure that families have the resources for a healthy life.

For example, to help meet the needs of Wisconsin families, Cooperative Extension Family Living educators and specialists are working with community-based Head Start programs to provide financial education to low-income families through the Money $mart in Head Start (M$iHS) program. Participants are more confident in finding money to cover financial emergencies and feel more in control over finances. One program participant said, “The presenters were wonderful and helped me so much. This was an excellent learning experience that will change my life.”
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Corn clubs of yesteryear are now thriving, diversified 4-H programs, with 4-H youth helping reduce county costs and teen recidivism through programs like Teen Court and serving on county boards through the Youth in Governance program. Youth who get involved in their communities make significant contributions to the quality of life and are more likely to be active, productive citizens as adults.

Youth are taking an active role in county government in 52 out of Wisconsin’s 72 counties and one tribe, including in Adams, Ashland, Bayfield, Buffalo, Burnett, Calumet, Clark, Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Door, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Florence, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Iowa, Iron, Jackson, Kenosha, La Crosse, Lafayette, Langlade, Lincoln, Manitowoc, Marathon, Marinette, Marquette, Milwaukee, Oconto, Oneida, Outagamie, Ozaukee, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Portage, Richland, Rock, Rusk, Sawyer, Shawano, Sheboygan, Taylor, Vernon, Vilas, Washburn, Washington, Wausau, Waupaca and Winnebago counties and Lac du Flambeau.

AGRICULTURE AGENTS IN WISCONSIN

Cooperative Extension agriculture agents help keep Wisconsin’s farms and agricultural businesses profitable. Agriculture is a powerful economic force in Wisconsin, generating more than $59.6 billion in economic activity and providing jobs for 353,991 people. Extension educators help farmers evaluate the financial health of their farm businesses, to use strategic planning concepts in making financial management decisions, and to think strategically about their future.

In today’s changing farm environment, producers are required to take on more of a managerial role on their farms. To help, members of Extension’s Financial and Risk Management Team updated AgVentures: Financial Management & Analysis curriculum to help farmers create individual farm financial evaluations. Further, the Dairy Modernization Team helps more than 1,800 dairy producers consider modernization options and management practices each year.

Karen Reisinger of Sauk County, a participant from one dairy program, said, “I sold my combine for $35,000,
which I used five days a year, and built the swing 10 (milking) parlor, which I use twice a day, 365 days a year. We now milk the same number of cows in half the time.”

COMMUNITY, NATURAL RESOURCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Early Cooperative Extension educators helped control an outbreak of “blackleg” in cattle. Today, Community, Natural Resource and Economic Development (CNRED) educators work to prevent the spread of invasive species, work to keep water resources safe and even help people discard chemicals, medications and computers. CNRED educators offer downtown revitalization and work to help communities create a healthier economy.

The combined effects of ailing downtowns, a struggling economy and reduced tourism have resulted in a loss of vitality in many Wisconsin communities. But specialists from Extension’s Center for Community and Economic Development, working with partners like the Wisconsin Main Street Program and the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, have found compelling reasons for optimism.

“UW-Extension’s role in boosting downtown economic development in Wisconsin has been priceless. Many Main Street communities and downtowns have used Extension’s assistance with market analysis and the webinar series to start successful business development projects,” said Jim Engle, Director of the Wisconsin Main Street Program.

Extension began as a service for rural communities. Today, Cooperative Extension educational programs encompass diverse neighborhoods in our big cities around the state.

“In E.L. Luther’s day, farmers learned about new innovations through The Potato Train, a train car that traveled the state providing education about the crop,” explains Cooperative Extension Dean and Director Richard M. Klemme. “Today, our educators are using state-of-the-art technologies to connect people to university research in ‘real time.’ We continue to reach out to new audiences with cutting-edge research so we continue to keep 100 years of history flourishing well into the future.”

More information about Cooperative Extension is available online at www.yourcountyextensionoffice.org.