

Technology in Extension—A Future Vision

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Many states have recently celebrated or will celebrate 100 years since the formation of their state's Cooperative Extension Service system. Wisconsin did so in 2012. This year (2014), we recognize the centennial of the Smith-Lever Act which codified into federal law, and provided funding for the federal portion of the partnership. In most cases, Cooperative Extension involves partnerships and funding with local, state, and federal funding and the Extension concept involves "extending" the resources and new knowledge created by land grant universities to the residents of each state.

While Extension has had a deep and rich history, there are several technology trends which are moving at lightning speed. These technologies have direct applications and implications for the target audiences of Extension. These audiences include individual family members (including youth), businesses, governmental agencies, NGOs, and community leaders. Obviously, this includes people in the food sector including producers, processors, and all others in the farm-to-table supply chain.

These technologies and their applications (current and future) in an Extension setting (technical assistance, education, two-way engagement, and applied research) will be discussed. They include:

- Mobile technology and applications ("apps")
- Two-way distance communication platforms
- Wearables
- Unmanned, autonomous vehicles/systems
- Big data & data-driven decision making
- Social media

In many areas of Extension work, we need to step on the technology accelerator both in terms of adopting technologies to add effectiveness and efficiency to program delivery, but also to demonstrate and facilitate the appropriate transfer of technology applications to our audiences. Such acceleration will be required to be good partners and to keep in step with the private sector. Appropriate adoption and use of these technologies will also be vital as we work to be competitive in an increasingly complex and competitive global marketplace.

Barriers to new technology adoption will also be discussed. They include administrative leadership and buy-in, financial constraints, the Extension "culture," and access to professional development for Extension professionals.

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