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## Discovering What Makes Urban Extension Unique Within the Interdependent Urban–Rural Continuum: Editors’ Introduction to the Urban Extension-Themed Issue of JHSE

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### Acknowledgments

This themed issue of the JHSE was made possible through the vision and contributions of the authors, reviewers, JHSE editorial team, and National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL). In addition to the electronic version, a limited quantity of this special edition was printed with support from Ohio State University Extension, Washington State University Extension, the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research, and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Copies were distributed by the National Urban Extension Leaders at the 2017 National Urban Extension Conference. The editors thank Michelle Gaston, Project Manager at The Ohio State University, for her assistance in organizing the manuscript review and revision process, communicating with authors, formatting articles, and checking references. The editors also thank Richard Kennedy, Graduate Assistant at Mississippi State University for his thorough editing of the manuscripts.

# **Discovering What Makes Urban Extension Unique Within the Interdependent Urban–Rural Continuum: Editors' Introduction to the Urban Extension-Themed Issue of *JHSE***

## **Introduction**

The world has become more urbanized, challenging Extension to explore innovative approaches that are relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally. This issue of the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension (JHSE)* focuses on urban Extension. The invited articles build upon the National Urban Extension Framework, published in 2015 by the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL), and decades of applicable insight documented through

- national urban Extension conference publications,
- *Journal of Extension* articles,
- special reports on urban Extension,
- urban university outreach and engagement scholarship, and
- urban Extension abstracts in conference proceedings from the Joint Council of Extension Professional (JCEP) organizations.

Evidence of strategic urban Extension approaches span decades as captured in a 2015 Literature Database for Metropolitan Extension. Recent commitments include the national Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) 2016 urban programming priority and ECOP's 2017 emphasis to continue the alliance with the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) while maintaining Extension educational strength in rural America. Regional investments in urban Extension range from special events in the southern and northeast regions to research projects in the north central region and formation of the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research.

To define Extension's work in densely populated areas, terms like urban, metro, and city have been used almost synonymously. City is one term used by the Census Bureau to refer to a concentration of population. The Census Bureau's urban–rural classification delineates geographical areas. Metropolitan Statistical Areas are geographic areas used by federal statistical agencies. But it is not just about geography. For example, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service assesses economic and social diversity of nonmetro America through classifications such as rural–urban continuum codes. Regardless of the term and implied meanings, Extension personnel and partners continue to explore best practices for Extension to implement as a catalyst for co-discovery and community change in large cities.

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Each city, county, state, and region brings unique context based on the area's political, environmental, economic, social, and other external factors. Even with varying contexts, shared commitment unites professionals who persistently address factors influencing Extension's work in densely populated communities where complexity, diversity, and urban–suburban–rural flows create challenges and opportunities.

*JHSE* seeks to bridge research and practice on topics such as human development, family studies, agricultural education, leadership development, Extension, health and wellness, nutrition, and program planning and evaluation. This special issue continues *JHSE*'s commitment to promoting the practical implications of research – the goal of this issue is to add to the national conversation on urban Extension through a diverse collection of articles for decision makers to efficiently draw upon as they consider urban dynamics and Extension investments. The intent is not to diminish the importance of rural and suburban Extension work but is to better understand unique characteristics of Extension in urban communities. Ultimately, Extension innovation along the entire rural–urban continuum creates connections and impacts that align with Extension's mission.

Authors address the distinct aspects of Extension in urban settings through meaningful examples of research, practice, and theory related to Extension positioning, programs, personnel, and partnerships. Contributing authors review historical foundations, current applications, and future influences of urban Extension. This special issue highlights the work of invited authors who have specializations in urban Extension and who represent a range of geographic perspectives. These authors' distinct circumstances and varied experiences collectively benefit Extension. Common themes include engaging diverse stakeholders, valuing partnerships, mobilizing limited resources, and implementing Extension's relevant approach to technical and human dimensions of innovation in metropolitan communities.

### **Invited Articles**

- Positioning Extension in large metropolitan communities is the focus of the first article. Reumenapp describes America's changing urban landscape and addresses challenges, essential elements, and current examples.
- Personnel in the city is the topic of the second article. Fox reports on a Competency Framework Development process used to identify unique skills, knowledge, and attitudes of County Extension Directors working in large cities nationwide.
- Understanding the challenge of scale in urban Extension programming is confronted as Tiffany provides examples of program strategies for 8.5 million residents in New York, the country's largest city. Tiffany visually displays Extension programs for community nutrition, youth development, and other impact areas. This mapping supports program planning and evaluation.

- To further understand program strategies, Harder and Wells introduce Florida's urban Extension strategic plan and explain initial qualitative research with Tampa Bay Extension agents. This intensive study incorporates Ajzen's theory of planned behavior and provides insight into the practitioner's point of view on urban Extension philosophy and strategy.
- Emerging programs aligned with Extension expertise include urban food systems and urban agriculture. Diekmann, Bennaton, Schweiger, and Smith summarize innovative programs in California's nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Their insight applies to Extension professionals working on urban agriculture programming, partnerships, and research.
- Obtopta expands the urban agriculture discussion to include community-based green infrastructure in New Jersey. This article provides an example of Extension's focus on one of the most important urban issues in one of the country's most urbanized areas. The author details Extension's relevant approach to community and student engagement, credible technical assistance and education, applied research and evaluation, and diverse resource portfolio management to improve urban priorities.
- Soule makes a significant addition to Extension programming through her timely article on terminology and steps to provide youth with programs and spaces that are inclusive of all sexes, gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. She defines terms, describes inclusive program elements, and presents practical steps for Extension professionals. This information provides a foundation to increase knowledge and confidence of Extension personnel and volunteers.
- Gaoloch, Kern, and Sanders present a programming alternative by illustrating Extension subject-matter centers and project strategies developed in the western region as a new option or addition to more traditional programming provided through county Extension offices. These centers align Extension resources with the needs of urban audiences and involve both community and campus-based professionals.
- Young and Jones reflect on the past and look to the future through their research in urban areas of Kentucky. They provide local and national perspective on historical and emerging approaches to enhance urban Extension. Their research in 2013 and 2016 provides insight into barriers and solutions for urban Extension programming efforts.

### Conclusion

The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension* provide a foundation to continue urban Extension conversations with existing and new allies. As a peer-reviewed, open-access, online journal, *JHSE* disseminates knowledge and information to academicians, educators, and practitioners. Research and practice shared in this issue can be used by Extension leaders at all levels to support decision making as they evaluate investment priorities to advance

the Extension mission in urban communities. Community and campus-based Extension professionals can evaluate past, current, and future scenarios. Diverse stakeholders engaged with urban community priorities can adopt or adapt approaches and examples presented; they can also connect with Extension to establish collaborative relationships to address urban issues. Students and professors of Extension education can use this issue of *JHSE* for applied research to create the future.

To expand on existing literature, invited articles intentionally concentrated on positioning, personnel, programs and projects, and partnerships. Impacts demonstrate how Extension is relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally with new partners such as the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties (NACo) Large Urban County Caucus – organizations that share Extension's interest in healthy cities. The actual value of the author contributions will be realized as Extension professionals replicate and adapt these examples in the context of urban communities across the country. *JHSE* is excited to publish this special issue on urban Extension. Innovation is evident as Extension leaders test new ways to position Extension, invest in personnel, pilot new programs, integrate technology, and develop diverse resource portfolios.

Julie Fox, Guest Editor  
Urban Extension-Themed Special Issue

Donna J. Peterson, Editor  
*Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*

### Resources

Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, Cooperative Extension Section, Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP). *2017 Areas of emphasis and ongoing priorities*. <http://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/board-on-agriculture-assembly/cooperative-extension-section/index.html>

*Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP)*, <http://jcep.org>

*Journal of Extension*, <https://www.joe.org>

*Literature Database for Metropolitan Extension*. (2015). <http://metroextension.wsu.edu/literature-database>

*National Association of Counties (NACo) Large Urban County Caucus*, <http://www.naco.org/advocacy/large-urban-county-caucus>

*National League of Cities*, <http://www.nlc.org>

*National Urban Extension Conferences*, <http://cityextension.osu.edu/conferences>

National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL): De Ciantis, D., Fox, J., Gaolach, B., Jacobsen, J., Obropta, C., Proden, P., . . . Young, J. (2015). *A national framework for urban Extension: A report from the national urban Extension leaders*. Retrieved from [http://media.wix.com/ugd/c34867\\_668cd0780daf4ea18cb1daddad557c72.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/c34867_668cd0780daf4ea18cb1daddad557c72.pdf)  
*U.S. Census Bureau's Metropolitan statistical areas*, <http://www.census.gov/population/metro>  
*U.S. Census Bureau's Urban and rural classification*, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html>  
*U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service rural-urban continuum codes*, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes>

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